

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 27 : Number Four : Winter 2006

A Leader's Mantle

Lincoln and Leadership

Leadership as Administration

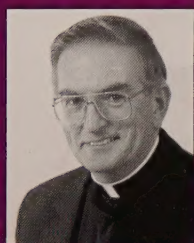
Models of Leadership

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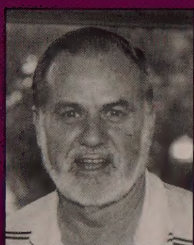
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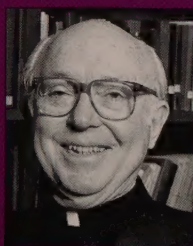
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Manuscripts should be submitted to the Executive Editor, Linda Amadeo, either (1) as e-mail attachments in any Windows-based (not Macintosh) word-processing program from 2000 or earlier or (2) by mail (see addresses below). Unaccepted mailed manuscripts will not be returned unless submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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# Editor's Page

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## A MEDITATION FOR OUR TIME

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A few months ago I asked a number of people to write articles on leadership in the church. So many responded favorably that we will devote most of this and the Spring issue to leadership. Some of the articles here are about leadership in religious congregations. The principles, however, have a wider application than to religious congregations. Leaders and followers in many organizations will profit from them. Not all of the authors are in agreement as to how to lead a religious congregation. That is to be expected in these ambiguous times. But all are thoughtful and will, I am sure, provoke insights and reflections in you, our readers.

Mention of these ambiguous times reminded me of a meditation I wrote for *America* in 2004. I wrote it in response to the crisis afflicting the Roman Catholic Church in the United States as a result of the abuse crisis and the closing of many parishes. Things have not gotten much better in terms of the climate in the church. In addition, the atmosphere in the larger world has become more and more dark in the past few years. Some of what I wrote then is still applicable. Hence, I am adapting that meditation for this article.

These are, indeed, dark times. I do not need to rehearse all of the sources of the darkness. In addition to the crises of the Roman Catholic Church we are reeling from natural catastrophes, the horrors of war and grinding poverty and disease. The first six years of this century have been dark indeed, and there is no end in sight. We live with a sense of foreboding and threat on all sides.

How are we responding to these blows? In a predictable way, according to some psychological analyses. One way we respond to threat is by an inward turn; sadness and depression are the result. Another way is by an outward turn, to look for the source of our malaise outside ourselves; resentment and anger are the result. And these two ways of responding can occur in a single person. Neither response leads to feelings of joy, hope or elation. In fact, the responses lead to conflicted individuals and to conflicted societies. Polarization is in the air.

In this situation, with all these emotions acknowledged as present among us as a society, and in most of us, I want to suggest a meditation on the Emmaus story in Luke 24:13-35. For the idea I am indebted to N. T. Wright, presently Anglican bishop of Durham, England, who offered such a meditation for the post-modern era in *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*.

In Luke's gospel we read a story of two disciples walking away from Jerusalem toward Emmaus on a Sunday morning. Some commentators believe they may have been a couple, Cleopas and his wife. Jesus had been killed and buried on Friday. On Sunday morning they had heard that some women found the tomb empty and had had a vision of angels saying that Jesus was alive, but these two had left Jerusalem for Emmaus without any hope. How could they have hope? They, like most of the people of Israel, believed that the Messiah would come to save God's people from their present status as an occupied and demeaned vassal of Rome and in the process begin the rule of God for the whole world. These two and the other disciples had believed that Jesus was this Messiah. But then he had been cruelly and shamefully crucified and killed. There was no way that what had happened to Jesus could be put together with his being Messiah. "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel," they tell the stranger they meet on the road (Luke 24:21). Their hopes had been dashed on Friday. The Romans showed who had the power by killing Jesus in a degrading, humiliating way. God had done nothing to stop this naked display of power. So Jesus could not have been the Messiah. Despair took the place of hope in their hearts. The news about the empty tomb and the words of the angel did not break through the despair. "We had hoped, but there is no hope now."

As they walked the road to Emmaus, they must have been wondering what they would do now and may even have wondered whether the whole expectation of a Messiah was a pipedream. Besides depression and sadness, could they have been filled with resentment and anger as well, resentment that they had been taken in by



Jesus, that their hopes had been so raised only to be dashed? Perhaps this explains why they left Jerusalem and their other companions to return to Emmaus. They were abandoning the community where they had been misled so badly, perhaps shaking the dust from their feet. Isn't that a normal human reaction to having one's hopes blown away? "I'm not going to get my hopes up again. You won't see me consorting with fools who believe in fairy tales." Do we see ourselves in these two people? Can we empathize with them because we, too, had hoped? I suggest that we walk with them in imagination and allow our own feelings in this time of world and church crisis to surface. What are my feelings as I contemplate the situation of our church and our world? Allow all the feelings to surface. They are our reality now, just as the feelings of the two disciples were their reality then.

After the disciples poured out their despair, their anger, their sadness, their resentment to the stranger, he proceeded to tell them the story of Israel in such a way that the death of Jesus on the cross made sense, indeed, made the only possible sense of Israel's history. Luke does not give us the details of the stranger's discourse, but we can fill it in without too much difficulty. Throughout Israel's history God had intervened to save the people when they were at their lowest ebb, brought to that point by their own sinful folly or that of their leaders. When they had no hope, God, once again, entered the picture and gave them hope.

Take one example from Israel's history. The prophet Ezekiel lived in the time of the Babylonian captivity when the Israelites had been carried off as slaves to Babylon and lived far from the Promised Land. The prophet is carried by the spirit to a valley filled with dead bones and is asked, "Mortal, can these bones live?" Of course, they cannot; they are dry and dead. But he is told to prophesy over the bones, "and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude." God then tells Ezekiel,

"Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore, prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:1-12).

Perhaps the stranger on the road to Emmaus retold such stories to these two disciples, reminding them that their faith is in God alone, and that God can bring the dead

to life, can save the people even when all seems lost.

As the stranger told them the story, a story that included the death by crucifixion of Jesus, their hearts burned within them, but, apparently, they did not pay attention to this burning sensation until after Jesus broke bread with them at the end of their walk. Why were their hearts burning? I venture to say that the words of the stranger touched something deep within them.

Let me explain. They, like all of us, are created by God's desire, a desire that never fails, that is everlasting, that knows not death and can never be extinguished. That desire creates us, makes us who we are, indeed, makes us desirable to God. And that desire lives deep inside us, drawing us to union with God. That desire evokes hope in us, a hope that, no matter what happens, we are wanted by God and will live forever with God. The trauma of Jesus' cruel death had overwhelmed that hope for a while, but the words of the stranger on the road stoked the fire of that hope again. When they reached Emmaus, they did not want to let the stranger go and prevailed on him to have dinner with them. In the breaking of the bread they recognized who the stranger was and then realized that their hearts had been burning as he told them the story. Death had not triumphed; it had no sting. The crucifixion was, indeed, the paradoxical victory of God. They hurried back to the community in Jerusalem where they found that their companions also had good news to match theirs; they, too, who "had hoped" now radiated hope and joy.

In this time of trial and the crash of hope this story can be good news for us too. But we need to let it touch us where we are, in our sadness, our anger, our resentment. Let's invite the stranger, who is no stranger, to tell us the story that will set our hearts burning again. After all, these few men and women who "had hoped" in Jesus began to transform the world once their hearts began to burn with hope again. Our own world and church can be transformed by people whose hearts burn with hope, hope that will lead to effective action to convince people that peace is the way of Jesus, the way of a compassionate God who is willing to take the risk of becoming one of us to help us be the human beings we are created to be, namely images and likenesses of God.

*Bill Barry, S.J.*

William A. Barry, S.J.  
Editor-in-Chief



# The Leader's Mantle:

## Creating Connection in Chaotic Times

Donna J. Markham O.P., Ph.D.

An incredible synchronicity seems to be emerging in the face of these quite challenging and dangerous times. As we enter more fully into the study of some of the themes central to the new cosmology, neurosciences, spirituality, physics and the behavioral sciences, we are confronted repeatedly with the intricate relatedness of creation—not simply among us as human beings, but the interconnectedness of all creation, the interdependence of all that is, and the profound beauty inherent in its self-organization and self-replication. Science is revealing a cosmos comprised of a vast, interlinked chain of dynamic organization and structure, replete with emergent properties yet shrouded in wonder and mystery. Psychologist Douglas Watt writes, “Perhaps no scientific discovery is more revealing of a vast interplay between large scale cosmological processes and smaller scale biological processes than the discovery that the complex compounds necessary for life are produced in the interiors of stars....We are literally made from the products of stellar furnaces that exploded billions of years ago and seeded our section of space with the building blocks of life.” We are truly interlinked, connected and interdependent as parts of creation. It is in the face of this overwhelming and ever-unfolding mystery that we look humbly at our own way of participating in life on Earth these days and echo the words of the psalmist, “*Bless the Lord, O my soul!*”





Simply put, in the best of all worlds, people who cannot relate should not be in leadership today. It is too dangerous to our survival.

*You are clothed with honor and wrapped in light as with a garment” (Ps. 104).*

Disturbingly, it is precisely in the midst of this deepening awareness of our connections that we are being brought face-to-face with our sin—the reality of the extravagant ruptures in which we collude. We shatter connection and do violence to wonder when we ravage Earth, when we devalue or dismiss or, worse yet, destroy another human being. We thumb our noses at the Creator when we withhold respect from the less powerful—from poor people, or gay persons, or women, or refugees. We shatter the connectedness of creation when we stand in silence in the face of injustice in our governments or in our church. It is precisely in these places of rupture that the responsible leader stands.

I believe this emerging, if not humbled, consciousness of our intrinsic relatedness, and our honest assessment of the ways in which we are complicit in destroying relationships, should direct the work of leadership—whether that leadership finds its locus in business, politics, society, church, or family. None of us is exonerated from the process of serious self-examination of our manner of exercising both formal and informal leadership. So, what does this mean for us? I would like to explore these issues from the perspective of psychodynamic psychology and its more recent emphasis on Attachment Theory.

Healthy leadership is central to global healing and survival. It is central to the process of restoring ruptured connections. Such leadership, of necessity, must be grounded in the capacity to stand in relationship, to foster connections across differences, to engage in dialogue in service of building global communion. Leaders who squander resources, use bully tactics, refuse dialogue, devalue the vulnerable, and bask in narcissistic self-aggrandizement are not only dangerous; they are acting in reckless violation of an emergent global ethic that reflects the simple mandate of

the Golden Rule—to relate with others as you would wish them to relate to you. Simply put, in the best of all worlds, people who cannot relate should not be in leadership today. It is too dangerous to our survival.

Our existential awareness of our interdependence and inter-connection has been heightened, and classical constructs challenged, through discoveries in astronomy, molecular biology, and dialogues among the great religions. Concurrently, psychodynamic psychology has given birth to *attachment theory*, through the work of persons such as John Bowlby, Lorna Smith-Benjamin, Kim Bartholomew and Cindy Hazan. Adult attachment theory is concerned with connections, with relatedness. In a curious and perhaps not accidental way, I believe it mirrors the yearning throughout various disciplines to discover the connective edges of our reality. Attachment theory examines the manner in which we humans form healthy relationships, thereby addressing our need for deep comfort and joy. Adult attachment refers to the tendency to sustain contact with and closeness to others from whom we derive a sense of mutual security and stability, protection and comfort. Likewise, it alerts us to the personal and social consequences of the absence of such ability to form connections with others. In the loss of healthy attachments, we experience an *intrapsychic* world punctured by profound pain, sorrow and rage and an *interpersonal* world characterized by anguish, despair, terror and depression. In other words, *lack of connection* is the breeding ground for violence. Alienation increases the paranoid proclivity to treat the other with dispassionate disdain. Framed more positively, then, our ability to engage and connect with others; our capacity to exhibit and solicit compassion and reverence; and our commitment to promote an awareness of interdependence is at the core of healthy adult attachment behavior that de-escalates violence and diminishes fear. With this in mind, I would further venture to suggest that this is at the heart of what effective leadership behavior *must* entail if we are to surface from our current, frightening geopolitical momentum toward disaster.

Ewert Cousins, speaking at the Gethsemane Encounter: Monastic Interreligious Dialogues, identifies this brilliantly as he expresses the urgency inherent in such a relational imperative:

*Although we are moving toward the global community, we face what seem to be insurmountable obstacles: ecolog-*



ical disaster, economic injustice on a worldwide scale, widespread warfare. Against these forces we must individually and globally devote ourselves to "building the earth."...The consciousness of the 21st century will be global from two perspectives. First, from a horizontal perspective, cultures and religions must meet each other on the surface of the globe, entering into creative encounters that will produce complexified collective consciousness. Second, from a vertical perspective, they must plunge their roots deep into the earth to provide a secure base for future development. They must develop a new spirituality of the earth and of the material aspects of human existence. This new spirituality must be organically ecological, supported by structures of justice and peace. The voices of the oppressed must be heard and heeded: the poor, women, racial groups and all other minorities....This emerging global consciousness is not only a creative possibility, it is an absolute necessity if we are to survive.

## Maintaining the prevailing status quo in the exercise of leadership leads inexorably to disastrous failure.

undertake together as believers: to assume a significant role in leading toward an alternative future based upon values of community, connection and compassion.

As I began to think about the role of leadership in light of all this, the image of the *cloak*, or *mantle*, came to me, and I began to think about leaders as necessarily being those who serve to enfold creation in this cloak of communion, connection, compassion and awe as they accept the mission to be co-creators of justice and peace upon whatever ground they walk:

- leaders as those who dare to call others to an alternative global vision, a vision wrapped in light and surrounded in transparent and truthful dialogue
- leaders as those who embrace an unwavering commitment to relationship and community as alternatives to separatism, exploitation and vengeance
- leaders as those who remind the community of its embeddedness in the sacred
- leaders as those who tend to the heartbroken, disenfranchised, and suffering poor wherever and whomever they may be
- leaders as those who recognize the groans of all creation as it struggles to enter into a new consciousness predicated on principles of connection and attachment.

This mantle of leadership is not something that can be shirked by those who are alert to the vulnerability of these times, *for the whole of creation is indeed groaning in one great act of giving birth, and not only creation, but we ourselves groan inwardly, too* (Romans 8: 22-23). Those of us who are awake and keeping vigil in the nighttimes of war, terrorism, violence, xenophobia, gender devaluation, and the abuse of power find ourselves increasingly pulled into spheres of influence where serious decisions must be taken. We dare not be silent or plug our ears to the roar of the groaning. Leadership today is all about having the conviction to connect across differences, division, discord, fear and

Many of us who have committed our lives to the service of God find ourselves balanced on an emotional and spiritual tightrope between profound worry about what is happening around us and incredible hope that we can, given sufficient faith along with the courage to enter into a process of profound personal and communal conversion, stave off disaster and break through to a new commitment to global unity and peace. Obviously, the looming, unprecedented ecological disaster and the frightening escalation of war reflect the failure, thus far, of the great religions—including our own—to awaken us sufficiently to the sacredness of creation and our interdependence as human beings. Additionally, our historical inability to live in cooperation as a human species further critiques our failure as people who call ourselves "people of God." Maintaining the prevailing *status quo* in the exercise of leadership leads inexorably to disastrous failure. Dogmatic self-righteousness and brute force serve only to hasten our planetary, national, ecclesial and familial demise. We indeed have a great and urgent task to



Leadership today is all about having the conviction to connect across differences, division, discord, fear and alienation.

alienation. It entails speaking the truth to power, and speaking that truth with love. Those who lack either the stamina or the commitment to undertake this should have the integrity to step aside and allow others to take the lead in this sacred work. Especially, as members of the community of faith who have committed ourselves to live the gospel, we—lay and ordained leaders alike—bear particular responsibility to transcend any “thinking binds” that keep us stuck in old patterns of compartmentalized self-righteousness, or too uncomfortable or frightened to enter into dialogue with the differing other. The imperative of this cultural, contemporary, relational emergence requires leaders in every arena of human enterprise to focus attention on the *communal mission* and the *depth of community formation* as these are critical to sustaining and healing this very precarious global reality. The universal communion, the connections inherent throughout all creation, lead us to awe and make reverence our sole rational response to one another, regardless of belief systems or cultural or racial differences.

#### HEALTHY ATTACHMENT AND ITS APPLICATION TO LEADERSHIP

How, then, might the unfolding mystery of an interconnected cosmos, global reality and the insights we have gleaned from attachment theory have bearing upon the task of leadership today? It seems that there are at least four non-negotiable values a healthy leader must embrace today:

1. the primacy of sustaining relationships over winning arguments
2. the imperative of dialogic interchange expressed through community
3. a commitment to witness to forgiveness and call the community to forgive
4. interpersonal availability.

Before addressing each of these values, I would like to look for a moment at the profile of the healthy leader, for it is actually the healthy leader who will be able to carry out the lived expression of these four non-negotiable values. Attachment theorists have formulated, in varying ways, a construct of personality organization that is hinged on two axes: the vertical axis of power and personal and interpersonal control or passivity; and the horizontal axis of affectivity, or interpersonal warmth or distance. Those persons who maintain a positive sense of self-regard and regard for others have a sense of inner authority. They derive energy from taking initiative and find enjoyment in interacting with others and are identified as “secure” individuals. These are people who have the capacity to exercise effective leadership as they call people to connection and community. They are able to subordinate their personal needs to the demands of the mission, for the sake of the good that is held in common. In the best of all worlds, anyone charged with leadership responsibility these days should fall within this arena of emotional health and relational ability. These leaders are engaged. They are connected to others. Intuitively, they sense the significance of relationship as it makes bold response to the mission possible. They elicit creativity as they encourage divergent thinking. Most of all, they have the ability to work through the ambiguity of contemporary agendas, all the while sustaining a high level of community commitment. Given that as a foundation, let us examine how the fundamental values of leading in these times can be expressed by these effective leaders.

#### THE PRIMACY OF SUSTAINING CONNECTION

When we persist in traditional methods of using power as a wedge to control, we are recklessly playing with terribly high stakes—the very survival of Earth. How will we learn to replace overpowering the other with partnering with the other? Knowing what we do about the necessity of respecting and intensifying bonds of relationship, I believe vigilant leaders must engage in *conflict-partnering* that counters the impetus toward destruction, the annihilation of life, and the loss of a sustainable future. We must replace rageful mastery over the “enemy” with efforts toward establishing some level of connection with the feared other. This will be extremely difficult and sometimes quite dangerous, but it is our only hope toward a sustainable future. This calls for entirely new modes of managing conflict and



discord. We may consider, more closely to home, situations in which we Catholic Christians are challenged to relinquish our sometimes imperious need to prove our points, accepting instead the opportunity to fashion relationships through collaborative dialogue with one another. This becomes an even more serious challenge for us as we open ourselves to dialogues with the other great religions—and yet more precarious as we look toward international efforts in service of peace-building.

Conflict-partnering is not the same as conflict resolution. Rather, it is a means of enabling persons to communicate, to strengthen connection, when they do not agree. So, conflict-partnering is not a matter of being right, or more powerful, but instead represents a commitment to start a flow of energy that results in mutual understanding directed toward the intensification of community. At its best, it is a search for what unites rather than divides. It is based upon the ability to sustain the dialogue, no matter what. No topic is prohibited in an atmosphere where mutual learning and understanding are valued as a means of connection and community bonding. In this way, conflict-partnering counters the cultural pull toward alienation, separatism, and the cold wars of back-to-back stand-offs—replacing this behavior with the intimacy of face-to-face and eye-to-eye contact. Winning the argument is thus always subordinated to sustaining the relationship.

Those of us who purport to be leaders in our Catholic communities of faith, who adhere to values of mercy and compassion and the search for truth, face an obligation to turn inside-out old conceptions of conflict resolution and develop ways of collaborating, relating with, and entering into extended communities on behalf of the suffering poor and the anguished Earth. This calls for nothing short of examining methods for managing disputes at all levels of ecumenical, ecclesial and parochial life, and developing methodologies that *foster* rather than *shatter* relatedness. The work starts in our own “back yard,” and it will not be easy. It is simply a necessity.

#### COMMUNITY PROMOTION IN LIGHT OF A “GIFT ECONOMY”

Community is the human expression of the yearning for relationship and purpose, the promotion of vibrant interconnection that is both a proclamation of the mission of the gospel and a means toward realizing the mission. As such, community becomes a metaphor for global healing. At a time of heightened individual-

Winning the argument is thus always  
subordinated to sustaining the relationship.

ism, alienation and loneliness signify the plight of so many. The loss of connection and meaning leaves people standing on very fragile precipices with few supports. And, as previously stated, the loss of relationship escalates fear and allows paranoid, hostile responses to gain a stronger foothold.

Effective leadership entails making certain that relational connections are sustained even in the face of inevitable discord. Community formation stretches us beyond our differences to realize our common participation in life. It attests to the fact that no one is really a foreigner. We have all come from stardust. The world has become so small that we are neighbors—no matter how much we behave otherwise. Leaders must, therefore, call the community to replace xenophobia with great-heartedness and to refuse to allow the night terrors of separatism to destroy the possibility of standing in relationship. There is no way to underscore adequately the challenges leaders face in engaging in such an effort. Leaders-in-hiding simply won't do.

On a practical level, this implies leaders' calling the community to a reformulation of how we think about the “different other.” There are inherent implications for us, especially as we think about how we Catholics have sometimes looked apprehensively at one another, assessing the other as too liberal or too conservative, or too much of a feminist, or too patriarchal to be deserving of relationship. Frankly, I find this a bit scandalous. We are metaphorically killing each other. And, if we do this among ourselves, how will we ever be agents of community-building beyond ourselves? As I say this, I am aware that there are many who will think I am being a bit naïve about all this. I would be the first to say that I have no magic answers, but would like to join with you as others in leadership who search for a bet-



It is truly the love of God that binds us  
through connections that are not to be  
broken by our differences.

ter way to intensify the community of believers rather than to continue to flirt with the consequences of continuing the *status quo*. It is truly the love of God that binds us through connections that are not to be broken by our differences.

Community goes beyond the difficult task of remaining in the tension of differences as we value relating. It leads to a conviction to diminish emphasis on a market economy where individual wants are pursued as we move more toward what Elaine Prevallet calls a “gift economy” where we recognize that all of life is in a continual process of “exchange.” As part of creation, we own nothing, but have at our use the gifts of all that has been created. We share the “Global Commons”—oceans, the air, space, and the soil. We use what we need, for as long as we need it, and then pass it on. Such a global communal attitude defies hoarding and invites us into a covenant of cooperation. It flies in the face of denigration—either of our sisters and brothers, or of our earth.

Leaders invested in fostering global communion call us to mindfulness as we make use of the goods that we have and invite us to *pass over* that which would move us to hoard, and *pass on* that for which we no longer have use (cf., Elaine Prevallet, *In the Service of Life*). This is an initiative that is likely to be undertaken only by those leaders who possess sufficient self-confidence and affection for others.

## LEADING IN FORGIVENESS

There are few topics where the fields of theology, philosophy, spirituality and psychology intersect with such invigorating significance as that of *forgiveness*. It frames healthy attachment behavior as it informs our way of being in relationship with God, with other persons, with other nation-states, and with human institutions of all kinds. I venture to say that to the extent we

fail in the exercise of forgiveness on a personal level, we place peace at risk on a global plane and taunt one another to continue along the precarious precipices of destruction of one sort or another. That is, the failure to forgive brings harm to the self, distance between peoples, and heightens the likelihood of retributive, violent response. While the decision to forgive is clearly a choice we may or may not make, I believe it is an obligation we bear, both as a community of believers and as global citizens. Furthermore, it is a particular obligation of leaders today.

But entering into the place of the soul and psyche where forgiveness beckons leads us into an uncomfortable and intimidating confrontation with the truth about ourselves. The wastelands of unforgiveness, these are the places where language has been ruptured and communication has ceded to frigid silence, the places where relationships have been shattered and replaced by the violence of impassive disregard. It is in this self-cultivated desert of imprisoned loneliness that we each face—if we are courageous enough—the starkness of our own humanness. And, if we are brave enough, it is here that we may just make the decision to forgive and take leadership in the journey toward greater hope and freedom.

Leaders who are not sufficiently grounded in compassion or who are too insecure in their sense of self will be unable to lead communities in the act of forgiving. More dangerous are those leaders who lack empathy for others and refuse to offer forgiveness, and, at the same time, see no need to seek forgiveness themselves. I believe this covert despotic attachment style has taken a serious toll on the exercise of contemporary leadership in nearly all areas of human discourse.

What does forgiveness entail? Allow me to share with you some definitions of forgiveness offered by persons in the behavioral sciences:

- *The willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity and even love toward him or her* (Enright et al, 1998, pp. 46-47).
- *Forgiveness is a summary term representing efforts to reduce motivation to avoid and to seek revenge, and increase the motivation to reconcile or seek conciliation* (McCullough et al, 2000, p. 229).
- *Forgiveness means letting go of every hope for a better past* (Kokomon Clottey, Ghanaian shaman).



- *Forgiveness is the adaptive framing of a seeming mistreatment or transgression such that one is no longer constrained by the negative attachment to it* (Snyder et al, 2001, p. 6).

While these definitions are a small sample of the wide array of efforts on the part of clinicians and others to describe what forgiveness is, these and other definitions seem to point to the fact that forgiving clears a path toward peace. It quietly restores reconnection to the community as it releases the grip of anger and vindictiveness. You will note from these definitions, that forgiveness does *not* mean pardoning, excusing or condoning either the harmful behavior or the offender. It does not mean that one forgets what harm has been done. The focus of forgiveness is fundamentally on the person of the forgiver and includes absolving the self of our own offenses and destructive capacities as well. Thus, forgiveness becomes a decision to opt for inner freedom, peace and a more hope-filled life.

Perhaps the reason we make the choice to forgive is that at some level of our existence we are in touch with the excruciating pain of a life imprisoned by grudges and vengeance. It is from the vantage point of personal anguish that we recognize in ourselves the desperate need to make a new choice for life.

Two decades ago, I was part of an international team directed toward fostering dialogue between Israeli and Arab leaders in the Middle East. I remember being astounded by the long memory—literally thousands of years old—of being harmed by the other. I quickly realized that, despite my youthful idealism and best intentions, it was not possible to budge either side toward forgiving. Vengeance had been seething for centuries and the standoff was yet to intensify further and become even more horrific. I learned much from that experience. I witnessed then, and on many other occasions, what happens when unforgiveness poisons the heart and intoxicates the soul. The current escalation in violence and loss of life across the Middle East tragically underscores the inherent danger when we refuse to speak to one another and refuse to forgive each other.

Even in the shadow of failure, leaders must continue to call their communities to forgiveness. More importantly, as leaders we must be willing to take the steps over and over again to forgive and to ask for forgiveness in the interests of re-establishing the interior landscapes of right-relationships.

Thus, forgiveness becomes a decision to opt for inner freedom, peace and a more hope-filled life.

#### PHYSICAL, SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY

Predicated on a healthy sense of self and a desire to be in relationship with others, the effective leader is affectively available to others. Intuitively and contemplatively aware of participating in a far larger creative unfolding of life, these leaders never lose their capacity to relate in wonder and reverence as they work to connect persons in a web of compassion. They serve as mentors as they stand in the tension of ambiguity and refuse to walk away from difficult conversations. They know that the healing of human life, the repair of the planet and the connection to the sacred are inextricably bound together and this drives their behavior.

So, in the end, the mantle of leadership is all about connecting. It is about engaging others in the sacred work of creating universal communion. Contemplative wonder grounds relational presence in these leaders. Thus, the cloak of leadership is about fostering and sustaining relationships throughout our families, our churches, our countries. To wear the mantle of leadership means that we never stop the dialogue; that we refrain from harsh judgment as we strive to make our adversaries our partners. It is about recognizing and reminding the community that we are connected to all that is created, that we reside alongside one another, and to harm another person or any part of creation is ultimately self-damaging. It's about realizing that this connection we share leads simply to *awe* and, indeed, makes *reverence* our only rational response to one another. And so we realize that in our God we are, indeed, *clothed in honor and wrapped in light as with a garment*.



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# Claiming the Vision: Lincoln and Leadership

Helen Maher Garvey, B.V.M.

*Inner strength had sustained Lincoln all his life. But his first four years as president had immeasurably enhanced his self-confidence. Despite the appalling pressures he had faced from his very first day in office, he had never lost faith in himself. In fact, he was the one who had sustained the spirits of those around him time and again, gently guiding his colleagues with good humor, energy, and steady purpose. He had learned from early mistakes, transcended the jealousy of rivals, and his insight into men and events had deepened with each passing year. Though "a tired spot" remained within that no rest or relaxation could restore, he was ready for the arduous tasks of the next four years.*



Pondering the direction of a church, synagogue, mosque or congregation of Catholic sisters, a spiritual leader might well focus on the first sentence of Doris Kearns Goodwin's assessment of the sixteenth president of the United States in her acclaimed book *Team of Rivals*. "Inner strength had sustained Lincoln all his life." Inner strength might be the most essential quality of spiritual



Leaders may seem to act alone, but, in reality, they act out of the profound resources of a life of inner and outer listening.

leaders. Although Lincoln was not a typical church member, God graced him with a deep sense of the soul. He contemplated; he brooded; he thought; he prayed. His inner strength did not emanate from the cheers of the crowd, but from the substance of his vision.

#### LINCOLN'S VISION AND INNER STRENGTH

If the vision is to live amidst the rugged terrain of ecclesial politics, family tensions and time pressures, the leader must travel the inner journey. A leader, advises Parker Palmer, "is a person who must take special responsibility for what is going on inside him or herself, inside his or her consciousness lest the act of leadership do more harm than good." This responsibility for the soul begets the self-confidence of those who understand their place in the larger world, their own gifts and limitations and their sense of belonging to a person, the person of Jesus Christ.

Besides self-confidence, inner strength gives perspective to the latest staff quarrels, committee impasses or, perhaps, one's own weakness and dryness. It also opens leaders to the issues of the day, be it the zoning issue for a Walmart, the struggle for a sustainable environment or the tragedy of Iraq. This inner strength, seasoned with the wisdom that only experience teaches, helps leaders grow in the ability to listen, to build consensus, to collaborate, to decide, to lead. Paradoxically, leaders, on occasion, must listen primarily to their own voice, a voice nourished with a deep attention to the personal and community experience that steers their moral compass. Leaders may seem to act alone, but, in reality, they act out of the profound resources of a life of inner and outer listening.

Discerning when to heed the consensus of the group, and when to receive and proclaim the prophetic word, the leader seeks the fulfillment of the vision. This vision impels one to speak one's own truth even

with the possibility of isolation. Indeed, Lincoln combined the vision of a prophet with the pragmatism of a shrewd politician. Resolving, by himself, to issue the *Emancipation Proclamation*, Lincoln asked his cabinet only for advice on implementation. Secretary of State Seward recommended that the decision await a decisive Northern victory in the field that would give credibility to the revolutionary action. Lincoln readily agreed, publishing the *Emancipation Proclamation* on New Year's Day, 1863, following the North's victory at Antietam. He fulfilled his vision, but he did it as a realist, just as he accurately counted the critical votes from Ohio, Pennsylvania and Indiana during his first election to the presidency.

In regular conversation with his cabinet, Lincoln's inner strength enabled him to love his colleagues. Yes, he loved his colleagues. One might imagine that his partners were his old friends, persons with whom he shared political goals and easy company. On the contrary, Lincoln's colleagues were his rivals, men who competed against him for the presidency, men who publicly and privately opposed his vision, his background and his credentials. William H. Seward, the Secretary of State, originally thought of Lincoln as a figurehead. Missouri elder statesman, Edward Bates, the Attorney General, considered Lincoln an ineffectual manager. Former Ohio Governor, Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, betrayed the president repeatedly through disloyal criticism. Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War, initially treated Lincoln with scorn.

Lincoln's choice of cabinet members reflects the confidence of a person whose main goal was the good of the nation, not his own ego needs. He welcomed the insights, opposition and diverse cultures that his adversaries brought to the complex questions of a divided nation. He did not require the easy acquiescence of fawning colleagues, though he earned deference through the integrity of his interactions with them.

By the time of Lincoln's assassination, all but Chase loved and respected their leader. One can only imagine the instrument of this transformation. One can only picture the generosity, patience, openness, integrity and decisiveness that drew the esteem of these former rivals. The situation recalls Edgar Schein's description of psychological safety. He asserts that in a changing environment, the leader must have the emotional strength to absorb the tensions inherent in change. The leader while supporting the organization often becomes the target of anger and criticism.



How does Lincoln's behavior relate to leaders in our time? How does it connect with role descriptions, mission statements, salary scales, core values and all the ingredients of administration and leadership? What does it say to the leader at the end of a tumultuous, and seemingly useless, meeting? How does it apply to the leader who must eliminate programs, sell the motherhouse or merge parishes? Conversely, what does Lincoln's leadership say to the new leaders who, without knowledge of the culture of an organization, must have their own team, their own "reconfiguration," their own immediate supremacy, leaving a trail of personal and corporate chaos in their wake?

The new leader might well imitate Lincoln's largeness of spirit, his "good humor, energy, and steady purpose." His humor defused tension in its self-deprecating style. Who could remain angry when the boss declared, "If I were two-faced, would I be wearing this one?" or when he advised, "When you have got an elephant by the hind legs, and he is trying to run away, it's best to let him run" (Goodwin p. 733).

This native humor became the servant of a larger objective, the steady purpose of the preservation of the union and later, the freedom of the slaves. A sense of purpose is the hallmark of leadership. Attention to the nagging, probing, relentless question of "Why?" insures the primacy of mission. Inattention creates ridiculous conditions. Gaebler and Osborne, in their book, *Reinventing Government*, tell the story of how, in 1803, the British created a detachment to stand on the Cliffs of Dover and watch for Napoleon. In 1927, they finally quit funding it.

The concept of mission is not a static one, settled once and for all after folks have discussed it, translated it from messy newsprint into framed calligraphy on parchment paper and posted it in the parish meeting room or the motherhouse chapel. No, mission is a driving concept enlarging the vision, upsetting the status quo, developing, expanding, stretching the community and the individual. The tendency to keep to the status quo is enticing for all of us, including Lincoln. He did not begin or end his presidency as a finished man. He grew in the process. He changed in the context of overwhelming suffering. Leaving Springfield, Illinois, February 11, 1861, at the Great Western Depot, he addressed his neighbors, "My friends, no one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting." But he left home as leaders must when duty calls.

Mission is a driving concept enlarging the vision, upsetting the status quo, developing, expanding, stretching the community and the individual.

How often leaders, and others, face the overwhelming sense of loss engendered by the clear decision to leave what is familiar, rewarding and, for many years, life-giving, in order to assume a leadership position. The phrase sounds eloquent, but who wants to be a beginner again, one who does not know the secret routes for avoiding traffic, one who does not immediately feel the satisfaction of direct ministry with the folks, one who is unfamiliar with the local ecclesial terrain, one who is vulnerable?

A leader risks the known for the unknown, whether the unknown involves change of position within an organization, or change to a new organization, or change in geography or a combination of these uprootings. A leader in a new situation is in the position of asking, a position of learning. Wisdom lies in learning from the new relationships while sustaining confidence in one's own gifts. A new leader's freshness is a gift to an organization, but if it is to be received, it respects the prevailing culture.

Lincoln's embrace of change was but a prelude to his suffering during the Civil War. He did not come to this conflict with an absolute opposition to slavery; rather his goals were the preservation of the union and restricting slavery to present slave states. Listen to Lincoln's pre-presidential opinion as related by Michael Burlingame in *Lincoln Observed*.

I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in anyway the social and political equality of the white and black races—that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality.



The essence of faith calls us to walk with this “tired spot,” to contemplate, to brood, to pray.

But this president changed. Listening to Frederick Douglas and other abolitionists, relating with black Americans, debating with his cabinet, Lincoln grew. A chastened, experienced president promoted and signed the thirteenth amendment to the United States Constitution outlawing slavery. For the contemporary spiritual leader the opportunities for growth through change are omnipresent. It is in the experience of failure, in the interaction with community, in the discipline of study and in fidelity to prayer that this development occurs. It is not a growth characterized by slavish devotion to trends or a desire to be “cool,” but a reasoned, faithful response to the principles of faith interpreted in this our time.

#### FAITH AND THE TIRED SPOT

The principles of faith related directly to Lincoln’s “tired spot” that no rest or relaxation could restore. What caused the tired spot? Was it his inability to prevent the war? Was it the death of his beloved son, Willie? Was it the carnage of the battlefields? What is the “tired spot” for contemporary leaders? Is it the intransigence of right wing extremists in and out of church, synagogue or mosque? Is it a seeming failure of renewal in Catholic and mainline Protestant churches? Is it the closing of dearly beloved institutions? Is it the disinterest of many young adults in ministry or in institutional faith? Is it the continuing heartbreaking failure of churches to incorporate women fully into their life and mission? Is it personal sinfulness in the midst of communal indifference?

It may seem cavalier to refer these losses to the great mysteries of faith. It may seem just a little glib, like the neophyte minister all too easily giving guidance to a person whose suffering she cannot comprehend. And yet the essence of faith calls us to walk with this “tired spot,” to contemplate, to brood, to pray. There are no easy answers, no quick jargon solutions, and no “feel good techniques” which will cure the “tired spot.” Certainly solid psychological principles help us to know ourselves and to understand the processes at work in our personal and communal development.

One relevant psychological principle is the psychological contract, a powerful force in societal interactions. The psychological contract is an unwritten set of expectations between the organization and everyone in it, and, unlike the written contract, is continually changing. Although it is unwritten, it can be a significant determinant of behavior in organizations and perceptions of violation can have lasting effects. What was the psychological contract at the time of one’s entrance into the ministry or one’s beginning a marriage, or professing vows? What is the contract now?

At the entrance into ministry one might have expected certain deference for the minister. Today, regard for a minister, or anyone else, results from the person’s demonstrated life for others; it is not given based purely on role or status. The emphasis is on the self-giving and competence of the person, not on her position. Marriage might have conferred a certain role for both husband and wife in the past, and it still does in some circumstances today; but for many the roles have evolved. It is heartening to witness husbands taking an essential role in child-rearing. Some wives are still looking for an evolution in the man’s responsibilities for housekeeping.

A Catholic sister making vows in an earlier time would expect the congregation to provide a position for her. She would usually be guaranteed a teaching or nursing career. Today a religious woman is generally obliged to act professionally and seek her own work. On the other hand, participation of all members in policies of the congregation has evolved significantly. Formerly, a new member would not be included in decision-making processes. Now, she can expect to participate in broad decision-making on a variety of issues early in her life in the congregation. These examples are not given to prefer one set of expectations over another, but to demonstrate the fact that expectations have changed on all sides.

The psychological contract is continually changing. How often a Catholic sister has heard one of her companions complain, “This is not the community I entered.” The speaker is right. The community has changed, not in its essence, but in the way that essence is lived in the present time. How significant is the role of the leader in understanding, communicating and developing the psychological contract. How critical is the leader’s part in ensuring justice for all as the contract



evolves. What skills does the leader cultivate in order to work with the members so that all gifts are incorporated into the process? Skills in group leadership are essential for leaders. They are responsible that meetings have clear objectives, that participants have equitable opportunities for contributions, and that there are clear methods of conflict resolution. The vision becomes a mirage if there are not concrete ways of bringing it to life.

The vision comes to life in a variety of cultural realities. Cultures challenge the leader to new learnings in analyzing the dynamics of a complex and fast-changing environment. If you have ever fumbled at a cash machine while a waiting “Bill Gates” jangled his keys, if you have found yourself the only white person in the Miami airport, if you have joined the “not a problem” rather than “you’re welcome” response, you have experienced in a very mild way the cultural diversity unknown even fifteen years ago. The social scholar Eric Law suggests that a simple way to imagine our diverse cultural richness is to ask a group to describe the experience of sharing dinner in the family of origin when we were twelve years old. It would be important that the group not represent just the typical group in which we regularly connect. What dinner table did the membership enjoy? Or was there a dinner table? The wise leader probes the powerful cultural currents alive in today’s setting.

So the “tired spot” can be partially understood through appreciation of cultural and psychological principles. Abraham Lincoln upheld the evolution of the psychological contract as the North and South unraveled the fragile compromises that had held the country together for almost a century. He understood the vast cultural differences between the North and the South, between the Democratic and Republican parties, between whites and blacks. New expectations developed on all sides. He learned different cultures through tense conversations with Frederick Douglas, black persons and his own cabinet. He really listened.

## CLAIMING THE VISION

And yet, culture and psychology only go so far. There are sufferings that probe the human spirit to its core. There is a “tired spot” that no merely human analysis can explain. There is the mystery of life and death, and for the Christian, the paschal mystery of death and resurrection. It is from this mystery that these sacred words of Lincoln’s second inaugural arose.

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in: to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

Inner strength had sustained Lincoln all his life. Indeed, Lincoln still teaches us about learning and about leadership. It is for us the living, especially for those who lead, to finish the work we are in—the work of listening, the work of learning, the work of changing, and the work of deciding. In essence it is for leaders and all people to bind up the organization’s wounds, to reach out to those who have borne the battle of left and right, to do all which will achieve a just and lasting peace, in our home ground, in our churches, synagogues, mosques and in our world. “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right,” leaders claim the vision.

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# Circular Models of Leadership: Birthing a New Way of Being

Ted Dunn, Ph.D.

Many religious communities are exploring new models of leadership in light of current realities, future trends and a fundamental shift in values. In the face of diminishing numbers and advancing age, for instance, many are wondering if the traditional models are best suited for them. Communities embracing new values, such as “co-responsibility” and “mutual accountability” experience that existing hierarchical models of governance are woefully inadequate. They wish to create more circular models of leadership that promote greater ownership and partnership in their community’s life and mission.

Traditional hierarchical models of leadership are inbred both in our society and in our psyche. Nearly every organization in which we live and work, governments, businesses, militaries and churches alike, are set up in a hierarchical fashion. A leader sits at the top who delegates authority and responsibility to the next level of management, who in turn delegates in a similar manner to those below them. We are all accustomed to this top-down, command and control world order.

However, some religious communities have been quietly breaking the mold and branching out into new models of leadership. “Teams” have replaced councils, “leadership” has replaced administration and, in some cases, there is no one person who sits at the top. Instead, the traditional responsibilities of leadership have been distributed to a wider circle of members who choose to share the burden, power and privilege of leadership in a more egalitarian manner.



New circular structures and concomitant values of mutuality, shared ownership and co-responsibility are challenging the old top-down paradigm.

While these movements are taking place there is a relative dearth of written material that can help guide communities seeking to create such models. This article is an effort to share the experience of communities that have begun the transformative journey of creating new models and birthing a new way of being. We will explore what is compelling these communities to change, some guiding principles for embarking on such change and departure points for creating new models.

## INVITATIONS TO CHANGE

### Demographic Shifts

Religious communities, as a whole, are experiencing fewer or no new vocations, an advancing average age and diminishing total numbers. The simple truth is that these trends result in fewer members available for leadership. This “shrinking pool” of leadership means that many communities end up “recycling” the same members in leadership, often taking those who would otherwise be in the prime of their ministry years. This not only reduces income for communities, but also deprives these men and women of their remaining good years of ministry. The longer they serve in leadership, the older they are when they get out and the harder it is for them to return to ministries for which they were initially educated and trained.

Fifty years ago, when memberships were at a peak, only a small percentage of community members served in elected leadership while the vast majority were free to serve in “outside” ministries. Now, because of decreased numbers, a greater proportion of membership is involved in leadership as well as other internal ministries (e.g., finances, health care and other administrative responsibilities). Fewer members are free to pursue external ministries without feeling at least some obligation to care for their community’s internal needs. Though communities are diminishing, the demands for maintaining them have not diminished proportionally. Communities are increasingly preoccupied with “maintenance” rather than “mission,” leaving many disheartened and asking, “Is this all that we are about?”

The burden of leadership and other internal responsibilities under such changing demographics is forcing many communities to question how to *choose life* in the midst of it all: “How can we share the burden of leadership so that no one is overburdened and

In the face of such changing and challenging demographics communities are facing a crossroads and are making different choices.

everyone pitches in as we are able?” “Ought we have fewer in leadership and free others for outside ministry?” “Could we do leadership part-time and also have a part-time outside ministry?” “How can we focus more on our mission, rather than remain preoccupied with taking care of our own needs?”

In the face of such changing and challenging demographics communities are facing a crossroads and are making different choices. Some choose not to change, to live out their days pretty much as they have in the past and die a natural death. Others seek new life for their congregation by changing the constitutions allowing for part-time or fewer members in leadership in an effort to release others for outside ministries. Alternatively, they might try to re-invigorate their efforts to get new vocations or explore new forms of membership in the hopes of stemming the tide of decreasing numbers.

Yet other communities are seeking more radical and systemic solutions to choose life. Some look outside themselves toward reconfiguration (e.g., mergers) in order to consolidate administrative and financial resources and expand the pool of leaders and members. And some are choosing new life by re-founding, birthing a new way of being and radically transforming how they organize themselves. They are creating new kinds of partnerships between leaders and members in order to care for their collective responsibilities of maintenance and mission.

### Urgings from Within

Certainly the cultural and ecclesial changes that took place fifty years ago had a profound affect on religious life. Members were given greater freedom and independence in their choices and no longer accepted blind obedience to those in authority. Open Chapters opened the doors for all members, not just the “privi-



Mutuality has become the clarion call of many religious communities and they are searching for models of leadership that honor this call, rather than contest it.

leged few” (i.e., elected delegates) to participate in the major decisions and governance of their community. In these open Chapters, Robert’s Rules were replaced by dialogic processes that emphasized consensus building, discernment and direction-setting rather than debate, majority rule and proposal submission.

Members were no longer passive recipients of decisions handed down from on high, but were becoming active agents in the process of decision-making. They were given more and more personal freedom, voice and responsibility to make choices regarding their education and ministry pursuits, living arrangements and finances. Adding to the impetus for change, especially for women, were those who decried the power abuses of the traditional “male-dominated hierarchy.” Blind obedience to a command and control leadership was increasingly challenged in both the Church and secular society.

Having moved from dependent or deferential orientations toward authority (pre-Vatican II), to more independent or oppositional orientations toward authority (post-Vatican II), the pendulum has been swinging back. Community members are moving toward *interdependence*. *Mutuality* has become the clarion call of many religious communities and they are searching for models of leadership that honor this call, rather than contest it. Members of religious communities, when given half a chance, want to take responsibility for their own life as well as the life of their community.

They want to live authentically as *partners* in a shared mission and vision. Members are seeking to *share ownership* for the life of their communities. They resist being relegated to something less than owners, as bystanders watching as others shape their future. Members want to *co-author decisions* regarding the life and mission of community. They do not want to rubber stamp what others

have decided for them. They want an active voice.

They recognize, perhaps because of their diminishment, that the exercise of power and choice that each member makes inevitably impacts the lives and choices of others. They are more sensitive to the potential abuses of position power. As a result, they wish to be more *mutually accountable* to one another and to find ways to share power more mutually. Members want to be *co-responsible*, rather than hand over the responsibility of their own lives to leadership or be left to do their own thing. These are the urgings from within that are impelling communities to explore new models of leadership and birth a new way of being.

## Indicators of System Failure

Beyond demographic forces and urgings from within there is a third set of reasons that motivate some communities to explore new ways to organize. These communities know what they are doing is no longer working. It is axiomatic that change does not occur unless something is wrong and there is enough pain to motivate a change. There are many telltale signs that can suggest to a community that how it is currently organizing itself is failing to bring out the best in its members and the best for its mission. Among communities exploring new models, here are seven of the most compelling indicators that told them it was time for a change.

### 1. Recycling leadership and reluctance to serve

Members are reluctant to let their name stand for elected leadership for a variety of reasons. Many view it as a thankless job, or worse, they fear being blamed, criticized or becoming isolated from the rest of community. They are afraid of getting “stuck” in leadership, losing a life on the outside and having to let go of their preferred ministry. As a result, whether or not they are the most *able*, the same people who are *will-ing* tend to be recycled in leadership. Members are reluctant to take on other internal ministry responsibilities (e.g., formation, health care, development, committee work) for similar reasons.

### 2. Leadership over-functions while membership under-functions

Leadership takes on the lion’s share of responsibility for carrying out chapter decisions and other community endeavors. Unwittingly leadership over-functions, stepping in and rescuing members who fail to step up to the plate and volunteer for committees or other respon-



sibilities. This fosters what psychologists refer to as a “hostile-dependent” relationship between members and leaders. In other words, leaders are upset with members who do not take more responsibility, and members are upset with leaders they perceive as not letting them. This is not a planned conspiracy, but a reciprocal unconscious dysfunctional dance that is common among systems where accountability is lacking.

### **3. Individualism and little accountability**

Individualism may have become an entrenched norm. Individuals seek to do their own thing and eschew the hassles of accountability to the larger whole. There is little accountability, leader to member, member to leader, or member to member. Members and leaders resist being told what to do or having to subject their decisions to the scrutiny and challenge of others. The good of the individual supersedes the good of the whole. “Doing your own thing” becomes the norm and rallying around a common mission or communal endeavor becomes an onerous undertaking.

### **4. Minimal partnership, ownership and involvement**

Members experience little ownership, partnership or involvement with the primary directional endeavors or internal responsibilities of the community. There is little trust or collaboration between and among leaders and members. Leaders make most decisions, while members have little perceived say-so other than to “rubber stamp” what leadership has already decided (“It’s a done deal”). Having little ownership members easily divorce themselves from the responsibility for carrying out such decisions (“It wasn’t *my* idea”).

### **5. Incongruence between core documents and real life**

The constitutions, policy and procedural manuals have little to do with how life *really* is and the chosen behaviors among leaders and members. Words like “collaboration,” “communal discernment” and “subsidiarity” are not translated into normative patterns of behavior. To the consternation of some, most have grown indifferent because of failed efforts to close the gap between espoused values and chosen behaviors. They are indifferent, that is, until attention is drawn again to matters of formation, common prayer and community life. When such subjects are raised, but left unresolved and these gaps persist, there is a pernicious effect upon integrity of members. Members become uneasy inviting new members because, in their eyes, “We are not who we say we are.”

Leaders and members alike often feel demoralized because their higher calling to be visionary and prophetic inevitably is overshadowed by the maintenance chores that grind away at their time and energy.

### **6. High denial**

There is high denial with regard to current and projected needs of the community. Despite repeated power point presentations on diminishing financial resources, future health care needs and challenging actuarials, it does not appear to penetrate or make a difference. Drastic changes seem unwarranted given a future that seems either too distant or unreal. There is more often a complacent response to these projections by the vast majority of members, even though leadership may be quite alarmed. It is similar to going to the doctor who repeatedly suggests we lose weight or risk developing high blood pressure – in one ear, out the other.

### **7. Maintenance overshadows mission**

Leadership is bogged down taking care of the maintenance needs of the community. While there may be a desire to be prophetic, visionary and to rally around their mission, this invariably takes a back seat to the ever-burdening maintenance responsibilities of caring for the elders, managing properties and finances, arranging funerals, participating on boards and so on. Leaders and members alike often feel demoralized because their higher calling to be visionary and prophetic inevitably is overshadowed by the maintenance chores that grind away at their time and energy.

These are not personal failures of either members or leaders. Rather, these are indicators of systemic failure. In other words, when these behavior patterns emerge, it is very likely that the ways in which members and leaders are organizing life in community is no longer working. Either the formal structures and policies are no longer viable or norms have been cultivated that erode their integrity. Either way, if many of these indicators exist in your community, the time may be ripe to challenge such norms and explore new possibilities.



What does it mean to explore new models of leadership or organize differently? What does it mean to birth a new way of being? Because hierarchical models are ubiquitous and alternatives are rarified exceptions, there are no turn-key packages that you can pull off the shelf and apply as is. You will have to construct a new model from the ground up and tailor it to fit your own particular needs and circumstances.

While there is no one-size-fits-all model, there are some important learnings that can be gleaned from other communities that have been down this path. Having walked with communities who have forayed into this uncharted territory, I would like to offer seven important guidelines for birthing a new way of being. While these guidelines are outlined in a step-wise fashion, there is nothing linear about the process of reorganizing. Several of these efforts will need to be made more than once, each time tweaking, better integrating and re-informing subsequent efforts.

### Denial-busting

Creating new models ought not be an intellectual exercise. For transformative change to occur there must be compelling reasons, ones that stir passions. In order to unearth these passions it is helpful to obviate the trouble by facing it head on, getting beyond the surface and breaking through the denial that encourages complacency. One way to do this is to gather all of the “younger” members together (using an age cutoff of your choosing) and say, “You’re it! You are the members who will be responsible for the community for its remaining days.” Gather them in the same room and say, “Now, considering that you are it, how would you like to do it?”

Other provocative denial-busting processes could work just as well. It might be better to gather the entire community rather than only the younger members. One way to bring reality into a Chapter setting is to arrange concentric circles by age groups ten years from today. Everyone who is 50 and younger in the inner circle, 51 to 60 in the next circle, 71 to 80 in the next and 81 and older on the outermost circle (whatever age groupings make sense). Then have them share their hopes and fears as they imagine their community 10 years from now. The power of this image of reality in ten years is compelling and evokes strong feelings and intimate exchanges for and against change.

The point is to push people past complacency with a

heavy dose of reality and help them recognize what is at stake if they persist in ignoring the handwriting on the wall. Members need to *experience* (not just hear about) the same concerns and pressures that leaders face on behalf of the whole community. They must be helped to recognize that the future is in *their* hands, that the whole and their part are inextricably bound, and then be offered the opportunity to *choose life anew* by doing life differently.

Once members are invited to share responsibilities according to their gifts and talents, new possibilities are sparked, and they are on their way to new beginnings. Once they realize that they are not stuck, if only they can claim their truth and choose a future informed by their truth (rather than wishful thinking), then new doors will open. When given a chance to create a future of their own choosing—to find new ways to create a life together, care for their internal needs, continue their preferred ministries and ensure the future of their mission—members jump at the opportunity.

### Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

If a community chooses to explore new models of leadership, it is important to know *why* and to keep returning to this question. Why look at new models in the first place? What would warrant such a huge undertaking? What is the problem you are trying to solve? What do you believe a new way of organizing will concretely do for you? Why might God be calling your community to look at this? These are the kinds of questions it would be helpful to explore and revisit on a regular basis, not just at the beginning.

It is easy to lose the forest for the trees when exploring new models and forget the real reasons for changing. It is so easy to get caught up in the *process* and the options for *models* that you forget to ask “why” one option versus another. It is easy to latch on to one community’s model, or another, or look for quick fixes when growing impatient with the process. If this were to happen, it would effectively abort the deeper conversations necessary for ensuring that deep change occurs along with the necessary ownership, partnership and clarity for carrying it out. Keep your eyes on the prize and hold onto the big picture.

### Getting to the Heart of the Matter

How do models of leadership and governance fit with a community’s understanding of their vows? Vows are not merely related to governance, but are central to its existence. For many, these vows ideally define what



it means to live in religious life. Such connections are written out in the constitutions and directories of every community. These are the pretext for understanding the agreements set forth in the constitutions and further concretized in the directories that make up the existing model of governance.

Messing with new models means messing with these vows and corresponding agreements that are the backbone of any model. Birthing a new way of being requires the labor of revisiting and renewing your understandings of these core agreements and how you intend concretely to live them out. It is an opportunity to explore and more fully resolve the otherwise uncomfortable gap between what is written and what is lived. It is the heart of the matter for many communities and where substantial tension may exist.

For example, different understandings related to the vow of obedience directly impact how power and authority are understood, codified in any model of governance and lived out behaviorally. A simple question in exploring any new model might be, “Who should have the power to make what kinds of decisions?” This question will surface paradigmatic differences regarding the vow of obedience. Does obedience translate into *deference* to superiors and laws of the Church? Or is obedience more about an asceticism of *listening* to the truth and wisdom of others? Such different understandings of obedience directly inform how power and authority *ought* to be exercised and, in turn, the approach to models of governance.

Any effort to create new models must grapple with these basic questions in order for it to have integrity. Does this mean that it will take years of theological updating and that everything about religious life is open to question? Hopefully not! How much time is spent working through these issues is entirely dependent upon each community’s interests and motivation to grow in this arena. However, because such basic commitments to the life and mission of a community are both the pretext and building blocks of any model, they cannot be ignored. If these remain absent from discussions meant to shape new models, you will run the risk of creating something that is at best functional, but will neither have integrity nor attachment to the soul of community.

**Truth and Reality Will Set You Free**

Henry Ford helped us to understand this principle, when he said that “form follows function.” While you can get ideas based upon what other communities are

A simple question in exploring any new model might be, “Who should have the power to make what kinds of decisions?”

doing, you cannot adopt their model and expect it to fit your needs. A community of one hundred members geographically dispersed with three sponsored ministries and a strong revenue stream is very different from one with twenty largely retired members living on a fixed income all in the same motherhouse. If a model is to be effective it must be born out of a particular context, chosen for particular reasons and shaped in earnest by those who wish to live it.

Having actuarial projections that clearly spell out your current and future demographics is a good first step. Another helpful step is to start with an assessment of your community. How many able-bodied members will you have in five, ten or fifteen years? What are your strengths, weaknesses and opportunities as a community? How will this picture change in the years ahead? How will you ensure the continuation of your mission and charism past the days of your youngest member?

Communities regularly conduct such projections and needs assessments, but such numbers and projections may not sink in as real unless members get honest and real with one another. Your truth, individually and collectively, will set you free, only *if* you can say it openly and honestly. If members are less than fully honest in saying when they want to retire or change a particular ministry, then any model based upon such misinformation would be a house of cards. If the youngest members do not want to do leadership for the rest of their life, they must say it. If someone does not want to live in a certain location for leadership, they must say it. The only way to be set free and find reality-based solutions is by putting the cards on the table.

**Get Outside the Box**

It might be helpful early on in the process to brainstorm with the participating members regarding all the reasons that will inevitably be voiced as to why a new



An important guiding principle is to consider all results a work in progress rather than something to be perfected once and for all.

model “can’t be done.” What are all the things that will be said? “*It’s against Canon law!*” “*We’re too old.*” “*It will take too much time.*” “*It won’t do any good.*” In ten minutes you will have dozens of these statements written on newsprint and splashed upon the walls, because we have all heard and said them before. Having named and claimed these knee-jerk, norm-enshrining, change-rejecting reactions, it might be just a bit easier to set them aside and let change begin.

You will need to set aside momentarily, at least, all constraints and pooh-poohing remarks that are sure to put a damper on the creative energy needed to spawn new possibilities. There are innumerable possibilities for new models, not just three or four, and in order to let these possibilities live, it will be necessary to let *what is* give way to *what could be*. Dream beyond minor changes (e.g., adding or subtracting one in leadership, full versus part-time, extended councils) and think big. To be sure, down the road, it will be important to test these possibilities against the rigors of reality (financial, legal and otherwise), but in the initial stages let your imaginations run wild and free.

### Groups and Processes

After you have identified the various needs of your community, brainstorm about potential work groups (structures) that could address these needs. For example, maybe you want a group of members to attend to the *care of the elders* in community, another to handle *finances*, and another to assist with *formation*. List the possibilities and then try to combine and collapse these into a manageable number of working groups (four to seven depending upon size and complexity of your community).

Once you have tentatively outlined what each small group might do, have members temporarily place them-

selves in the groups in which they wish to participate according to their personal desires and talents. Once in these groups, have them work on developing decision-making processes, work flow and communication. Who will have the authority to make what decisions, and how will this be done? Who will inform or consult with whom, and how will the flow of communication work? How often will these small groups meet and where?

Figure out together how to get the work done during meetings and in-between. Who will plan and evaluate the work? How will the separate work groups integrate and coordinate their work? How will you include the elders or those unable to do the work of your community? This is where the model begins to take shape, which is exciting. It is also where the reality of “meetings” hits home, which is not so exciting. Ownership means involvement, which means meetings, which is commitment, which asks for sacrifice. Keep talking and keep it all tentative.

### Embrace the Journey

The more radical the departure from what currently exists, the more time and effort it will take, and the more mistakes there will be in working through all that is required to bring clarity. Confusion, messiness and mistakes are all part of the creative process. In such a process, an important guiding principle is to consider all results a work in progress rather than something to be perfected once and for all. A mindset that views such efforts as an ongoing evolutionary journey rather than a one-time event is an important one to adopt.

A corollary to this guideline is to work at becoming a learning community. In other words, let your mistakes, which are inevitable, be a helpful guide to your next best step. Treat the chaos and missteps as learning opportunities rather than failures. Periodically reflect upon what you have done, how you have done it, where the new model is working and where it is not. Let these reflective learnings continue to unearth new pathways and opportunities for growth. *Keep it simple, write nothing in stone and continue to experiment and evolve.*

### Discerning Participation

The ones who involve themselves in creating a new way of being, those who craft and create a new model, are the ones who will eventually own it and claim it as theirs. If there is no involvement, there is no ownership. Thus, everyone needs a place at the table, and there must be a means for finding their seat.





Figure 1: Traditional

Yet finding the best combination of those “willing” and “able” to help with each component of the model is no easy task to accomplish. Many times those who are *able* are *less willing* and those who are *willing* may be *less able*. There must be a method for discerning together which individuals are both willing and able to do what and how this fits with the needs of the whole. These conversations about abilities, boundaries, and sacrifice are both delicate and essential to the future viability of any model. Participants must be valued for what they are actually capable of doing and challenged not to do more, or less, than their abilities allow.

Using discernment as a method for placing your talents to their best use in community is a valuable means for arriving at peace-filled choices. Combining personal and communal discernment methods ensures that individual preferences are in sync with the needs of the whole. This way everyone discerns with everyone and ownership is ensured by all. I have seen this process work in some cases.

## MODELS OF LEADERSHIP

The following models depict three broadly different approaches to leadership (*Hierarchical, Concentric and Circular*) with one or two variations on each. These are merely examples and not at all exhaustive of the endless possibilities and permutations. Use these as “departure points” intended to illustrate models that support different values of leadership, each with their pros and cons. Adapt the categories, numbers, squares, or circles shown here to suit your own needs. Use your imagination and determine what fits for your community and your circumstances.

## Hierarchical models

The traditional hierarchical model is the one most familiar to us. This is the model out of which most businesses and communities govern themselves. In this model, leadership resides at the top and authority is delegated from the top-down. In the first example, (figure 1) the “councilor” might just as easily be depicted as department “chair,” “vice president” or other titles familiar to us as the second tier of management. The expanded council model (figure 2) is a variation on this same theme and some communities have adopted this model. Remember, the number of councilors and boxes could easily be adjusted to whatever suits your needs.

## Concentric models

Shortly after 9/11, when Michael Bloomberg was elected mayor of New York City, he chose to take his office out of the upper floor and place it right in the middle of where his staff worked. He chose this both as a symbol and as a genuine effort to work as *one-among*. He was still in charge, but he wanted to open up communication and operate more collegially. He did not want to remain in the ivory tower, aloof and removed from where the action was. Rather, he wanted to roll up his sleeves and pitch in along side everyone else. He tore down the walls and partitions that separated and rank-ordered the offices and staff that inhabited them. He created a more open space where communication and decisions could flow more easily.

The concentric model puts leadership in the middle, (i.e., at the hub, instead of on top) and encourages more reciprocity between leadership and membership. Leadership is concentrated in the middle, but also extends outward as other subgroups take the lead in



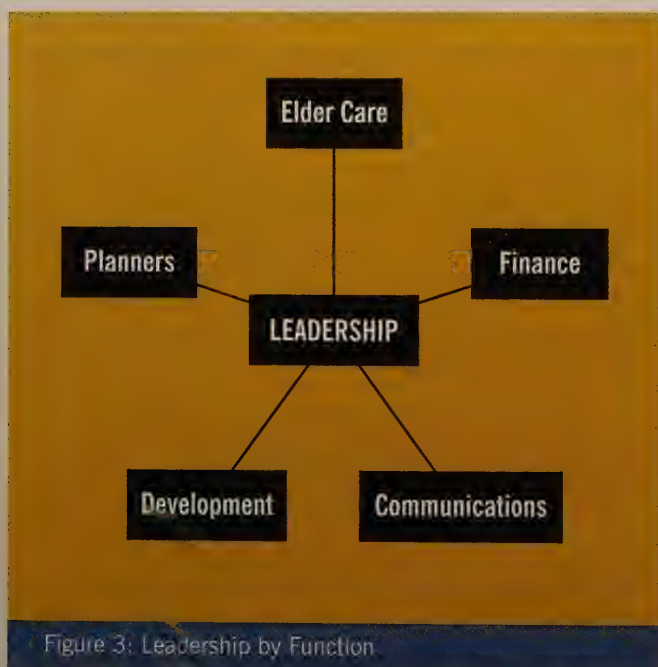
Figure 2: Expanded Council



their respective areas. In other words, subgroups are not simply committees that do the work delegated by leadership, but workgroups with distinctive areas of responsibility and authority. While the emphasis may be on coordination, integration and planning they have a specified degree of autonomy to implement and make decisions as well.

The concentric model could be organized by *function* (figure 3) or by *area* (figure 4). When organized by function, different groups come together to take care of certain functions or responsibilities. These are passed through and coordinated with leadership. Leadership serves as the primary locus of integration and coordination and retains whatever authority is agreed upon.

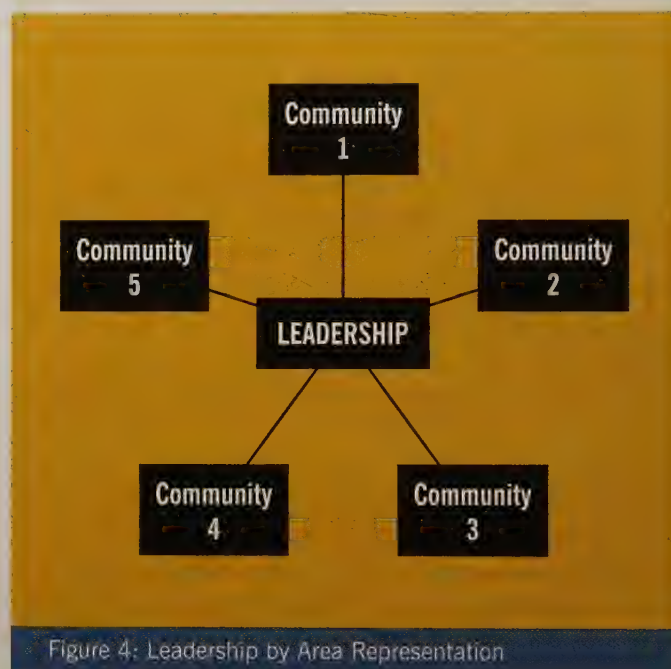
Leadership by area representation is best used when a community or province has sub-communities that are geographically dispersed. Each local or sub-community would have a team who would assist in coordinating efforts in their particular area. These teams, including the central leadership team, however, are not emphasizing a top-down approach. Like the *leadership by function* model, their primary purpose is coordination, integration and planning, though they too have a certain amount of autonomy to implement and make decisions.



### Circular Models

In the *leadership as one among* (figure 5) the canonically required leaders *choose* to function with

the same kind of reciprocal power as do all other small circles (i.e., groups or teams). They are not atop a pyramid. Each small circle, including the leadership circle, has responsibilities and powers distinctive to their respective areas. All of these small circles share power within their members and with the other circles. Just as with other small circles, the leadership circle does not wield power over others except in their designated responsibilities. The finance, elder care and other circles function similarly and are responsible for making decisions in their respective areas.



In the “*leadership as one circle*” (figure 6) the entire circle functions as a leadership team. All of the traditional responsibilities of leadership are distributed to members in smaller circles. There is no leadership of just three or five. Rather, it is comprised of all who participate in small circles who, in turn, make up the large Circle. This could be any number of people depending upon the size and compositions of the small circles. All “major” decisions come to this large circle forum, while other decisions are made in their respective smaller circles. This large circle sets direction, makes final decisions and agreements for the new model, and discerns who participates and how.

The canonically required leadership *chooses* to function in the similar manner as other members. In



other words, they each have their distinctive responsibilities and share power with other members who likewise have other distinctive responsibilities. They technically fulfill the canonical requirements (more titular in this regard), but choose to function under a very different set of values. In other words, they share power and mutual accountability like everyone else.

Circular models of leadership encourage the greatest commitment to mutuality and reciprocity between members and leadership. These illustrate what are perhaps the most radical departures from the kinds of models currently in use by the vast majority of religious communities. Therein lies both the opportunity and the challenge. Few communities have tried them, and the ones that I have had the privilege to assist as midwife are still evolving and discovering new ways of being.



Figure 5: Leadership as One Among

## CONCLUSION

Birthing a new way of being is about a journey toward life for communities that have reached a crossroads. Reconfiguring, re-founding and exploring new forms of membership are viable options for many communities to choose life. For communities whose demographics insist upon change, whose urgings to live their values more authentically impel them to change,



Figure 6: Leadership as One Circle

new models may be the way to go. It is one road that leads to re-founding and reclaiming community. When there are strong indicators that your current model is no longer viable, there may be sufficient motivation to embark on such a road less traveled.

I have had the privilege of assisting a small community in Canada, another in Central America and a few communities in the United States in giving birth to a new way of being. These communities knew that how they were living life was no longer working. They made a choice to sit down together and figure it out. They faced their choices for life or death and chose life anew by radically shifting the way they organized their community. They stopped “trying harder” and decided amidst great struggle and with a leap of faith to try something entirely different.

These communities did an honest appraisal of who in their community was capable of doing what regarding leadership and other internal ministry responsibilities. They let no one who was capable of doing something off the hook and remain on the fringes to “do their own thing.” “Co-responsibility” and “mutual accountability” were no longer words given lip service, but were guiding principles in whatever new structures they created. Each community’s circumstances, motivations and make-up has been different, but each shared some common characteristics.

They had more than a dim awareness that they



	Hierarchical	Concentric	Circular
Power	Top-down	Center - outward	Reciprocally shared
Work Flow	Delegated	Leadership collaborative	Mutually collaborative
Boundaries	Clear, "Need to know" basis	Clear, semi-permeable	Clear and permeable
Accountability	Member to leader	Leader to member, member to leader	Leader to member, Member to leader, Member to member
Efficiency	High	Medium	Low
Partnership Ownership Involvement	Low	Medium	High
Skills	Command and control, administrate, maintain and delegate		

Figure 7: Pros and Cons

were dying if they did nothing and were in enough pain to do something substantial about it. They had a pioneering spirit and enough courage to go with whatever discoveries that their processes and discernment uncovered. Their faith in God and one another fueled their willingness to stay in the struggle believing that if they did so, answers would come.

They have come to discover that any model has its pros and cons (figure 7) and that its integrity ultimately rests upon the people involved—their belief in what they are doing, why they are doing it and their willingness to carry it out. These communities have not found a panacea, but they are no longer stuck. They are on the road to new life and they are *in it together*.

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# Leadership in Religious Communities: Witnessing to the Power of Resurrection

Helen Cahill, O.P.

“What keeps us from sleeping is that they have threatened us with Resurrection!”

Accompany us then  
on this vigil  
And you will know  
How marvelous it is  
to live  
threatened with Resurrection!”  
(Julia Esquivel)

To be threatened with Resurrection—such a contradiction! And yet, we all know the experience of resisting what we earnestly desire. In a world where there is a growing culture of control, the Resurrection, God’s affirmation that the *power of love and freedom* prevails over the *power of control and domination*, is threatening to many people. Although love and freedom are values we espouse, we often resist them because of the demands they make on us. And yet, the power of the Resurrection is in the very act of living.

While in leadership, I became aware of how often relationships with my sisters were characterized by *power as control* rather than *power as love and freedom*. Conversations with them often evolved into

power struggles that I was determined to win. An attitude of knowing what was good for them took priority over creating conditions of love and freedom that would nurture their growth. This humbling and life-giving awareness became a sign of God’s transforming action in me. As I struggle, even today, with the dynamics of *power as control*, a deeper understanding of human and divine power continues to come to birth in me. I am convinced that the call to be holy as God is holy (Leviticus 19:2) invites me to relate in ways that witness to the truth of the Resurrection: *divine power is love and freedom*.

In response to the Second Vatican Council, women and men religious initiated unprecedented levels of change in how members and leaders related to each other. Their understanding of leadership changed accordingly. A fundamental rethinking of relationships resulted in a commitment to shift from the dynamics of domination and control to more mutual and reciprocal dynamics. Collegiality became a value in all decision-making processes. For the most part, structural changes were cosmetic and did not match the organic changes made in relationships. While it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the effects from maintaining hierarchical structures, I believe that more organic struc-



## The next stage in the evolutionary process is dependent on human beings uniting with one another to form a creative union.

tures would have served us better relationally. Nonetheless, women and men religious did experience profound changes in exercising power and in leadership styles different from their earlier experiences.

These changes are manifest today in religious assuming more responsibility for their personal and communal lives and in the creativity and personal growth that continues to emerge. Dialogue, interdependence, and mutuality often characterize relationships and decision-making processes. These are hopeful signs of efforts to embody leadership as a counter-cultural alternative to the leadership styles that often dominate church and society.

All of this notwithstanding, there is among many leaders a growing tendency to assimilate the mainstream United States culture of control into religious life, in sharp contrast to Timothy Radcliffe's vision that "religious life should explode into this culture of control as a burst of crazy freedom" (Congress of Religious Life, 2004). Stories of religious support the thesis that the dynamic of control is creeping back into their lives. Unfortunately, examples come easily: leaders make decisions without dialogue with those whose lives are significantly impacted by the decisions; a spirit of mutuality and interdependence is often absent from relationships; members are told what they may and may not do; and a climate of fear often causes members to feel powerless and to assume a stance of submission.

These situations in which the power exercised is one-sided and non-reciprocal tend to exacerbate the natural imbalance of power between members and leaders. They create an incredible amount of hurt in the lives of both. They also call into question the potential of religious to face the challenges of the 21st century. Social psychologists tell us that facing these challenges calls for a new level of consciousness that propels us into the continuing creative work of evolution. In her work, *The Grand Option*, Dr. Beatrice Bruteau proposes that the next stage in the evolution-

ary process is dependent on human beings uniting with one another to form a creative union, that is, to share our most intimate energies of love.

Bruteau's thesis has much to offer to the pressing issue of leadership in religious life. Demographics have brought about a shrinking pool of persons for leadership. The fact that religious are excellent leaders in their ministries causes me to wonder if their resistance to being leaders in community is not grounded in a style of leadership that has lost its relevance. The seriousness of the crisis suggests that the time is ripe for religious to rethink what it means for members and leaders to be in right relationship with each other; what it means to share the energy of love and to consider seriously the power dynamics that characterized power as Jesus exercised it.

My point is not to dispute or undermine the responsibility of leaders to make decisions. We give leaders authority to make decisions in our name, to serve us in a way compatible with our values, and to foster conditions of freedom that enable us to be faithful to the vision we authorize together. To jeopardize their authority, in any way, would be unjust. My hope is to encourage religious to stand firm in their decision to relate in ways that foster love and freedom, and thereby to resist the dynamics of power that characterized life prior to renewal.

To do this, I will address the nature of leadership through the lens of power, with the hope that a common understanding of the dynamics of power will result in a use of power that positively impacts relationships. Drawing on a contemporary resource, philosopher and theologian Bernard Loomer, I will compare two paradigms of human power and their corresponding styles of leadership. Using scripture as an entry point, I will discuss briefly the nature of divine power as manifested in the life of Jesus. Examples will illustrate how the dynamics of power manifest themselves. Finally, I will offer ideas that may help leaders to monitor their use of power.

### POWER

Let us consider some aspects of power—a complex and neutral concept that is part and parcel of life. Loomer asserts that to be alive is to have power. As energy embodied in relationships, power may be life-giving or life-diminishing. Because false notions of power are prevalent and the abuse of power is so com-



mon, the word “power” often conjures up only negative images: control, domination, passivity, and enemy-making, to name a few. To limit one’s understanding of power to these and similar images which do not nurture the human spirit is, in the thought of theologian Karl Rahner, to neglect the real and more noble manifestations of power—the power that encourages love, freedom, and creativity.

### Paradigms of Power

In a lecture at the University of Chicago Loomer described two paradigms of power: unilateral (power over) and relational (power with). Power is commonly understood to be the ability to do or to act, to bring about change, and to influence people and situations. Loomer puts forth a radically different interpretation of power, one in which mutuality, interdependence, and reciprocity are essential. In addition to acting, influencing and effecting change, there must be a desire for and a willingness to be changed by interaction with others; a capacity to receive as well as to give; and a reciprocity that takes into account the feelings and values of others. Loomer names this capacity relational power—in its richest meaning, it is power that sustains mutually-internal relationships that nurture the human spirit. A closer look at these paradigms will help to distinguish them.

### Unilateral Power

As power over and against, unilateral power is one-sided, non-communal and non-relational. Self-interest takes priority over relationships. Perceived as a zero sum game (there is only so much power to go around), unilateral power fosters competitive relationships in such a way that resolving conflict results in winners and losers. Rooted in an individualistic understanding of self, this paradigm perceives others as objects and minimizes a healthy concern for them. Unilateral power is often exercised in caring for others under the guise of “I know what is good for you.” The relationship is essentially “external” because there is little interior change. In this view, freedom has a permissive quality to it, e.g., as a free individual, I can do what I wish regardless of the effects on others. This attitude leads to unreasonable claims on life that translate into injustices. It is interesting to note, however, that the control exercised in unilateral power can be so subtle and benign that it may be mistaken for relational power. Loomer asserts that the practice of unilateral power exacerbates injustice.

Respect for and acceptance of the other is the bedrock of mutuality.

### Relational Power

Relational power is mutual and communal. Because power is shared there is more of it to go around. In resolving conflict each person respects the needs of the other and is willing to negotiate so that the outcome is a win/win situation. Because the self is constituted by relationships, each person is invested in the interests of the other and the common good. Relationality is essentially “internal” since both persons are changed in the interaction. Mutuality is a significant aspect of relational power even when roles and degrees of authority are different. *Mutuality does not mean equality*, but it does mean the absence of domination and “power over” in the relationship. Respect for and acceptance of the other is the bedrock of mutuality. In this paradigm freedom is at the heart of what it means to be human. We are free to love and to choose freely that which is good not only for ourselves but also for others. There is no hint here of the permissive quality that shapes freedom in unilateral power.

Loomer admits that these paradigms are ideal types that do not necessarily address the complex and messy realities of life. In their writings Evelyn and James Whitehead offer insights that take these basic realities into consideration and shed light on Loomer’s paradigms of power. Distinguishing control from coercion, the Whiteheads give legitimacy to the former when its function is coordination. For example, leaders exercise legitimate control when they assist members in being faithful to the vision they author together when they monitor community resources and when they give direction to corporate efforts in a unifying manner. When exercising power as control in this manner, mutual accountability is essential to avoid force and manipulation.

Exercising “power against” is, according to the Whiteheads, needed to contest and to match our strength and skill against that of another. Being able to contest is a part of adult maturity and an important aspect of conflict resolution. Personal strength is need-

ed to have the difficult conversation to hold one's own with integrity and to engage others in intimate relationships. Collaboration requires that we be strong enough to work out differences and to move through conflict especially in situations where we must speak our truth with love in opposing injustice. If love is the originating source of these efforts, then they are concrete expressions of relational power and not an attempt at having "power over" the other. In other words, relational power and "tough love" are not mutually exclusive.

## STYLES OF LEADERSHIP

### Leadership and Unilateral Power

The styles of leadership associated with each of the paradigms of power differ. In essence, the difference lies in the nature of the relationship between members and leaders. In the unilateral paradigm leadership is understood to be something a person possesses. Value is placed primarily on what the leader wants. Leaders who choose the unilateral paradigm as their preferred way of leading exercise *power as control* which often is cloaked with an attitude of caring and knowing what is good for others. The expectation of compliance from the group stifles creativity and distracts from the power of the group. The gifts of the members are not sufficiently recognized and encouraged. Instead of mutuality, an external relationship exists between the leader and the group.

As Joseph Rost suggests, leaders in the unilateral paradigm are expected to be great women and men who have "certain preferred traits, who influence followers to do what the leaders wish in order to achieve group/organizational goals that reflect excellence, defined as some kind of higher-order effectiveness." Most religious can resonate with the experience of generating an image of a "super person" to be their leader. This style of leadership with its emphasis on compliance stresses competition and reinforces hierarchical relationships. A climate of fear, defensiveness and intimidation often prevails. At a time when religious life needs people to risk working together, this style does not serve religious well. In its place is needed a style of leadership where all participate in the flow of reciprocal relationships.

### Leadership and Relational Power

In the relational paradigm the meaning of leadership corresponds to its meaning in the social sciences: as a process of group interaction with a focus on the

achievement of common goals. Belonging primarily to the group as a whole and secondarily to its leaders, it refers to patterns of initiative and influence that develop in a group. While designated leaders are significant, they are only part of the pattern of the group's social power. Everyone shares in the responsibility to enter into the leadership dynamic which deals with the organic and systemic life of the group. All members are responsible for group life. As might be expected, this shift from leader to group results in more realistic expectations of its members who are equally responsible for the common good. Members and leaders are partners with mutual purposes. By placing responsibility for the life of the group on the members, this style of leadership challenges everyone to exercise their power in a way that reflects their mutual purposes. Leaders have a unique influence on the group in so far as they are able to keep members connected and to provide processes so the group functions well. These leaders are able to discern, interpret and communicate the power at work in the group as they mobilize the group's collective energies.

## THE POWER OF JESUS AS LEADER

The New Testament offers an abundance of metaphors that describe power as Jesus exercised it. The crowds wanted to touch him because power went out from him (Luke 6:19). Not all were attracted to the power of Jesus, whose vision was an alternative to the imperial power of the Empire. Those exercising *power as control* did not sanction the power of Jesus, which confronted all other powers with a new vision, the power of love, freedom, and forgiveness. Jesus did not allow for privileged power positions in his community (Mark 10: 35-45). Two poignant symbols, Jesus washing feet and the crucifixion, leave no doubt about the nature of power that Jesus exercised. Both symbols illustrate the difference between unilateral and relational power.

In the culture of the day slaves did the foot washing. No signs of mutuality were evident in the experience. By washing feet Jesus made mutuality the new cornerstone of relationships. "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (John 13:15). Jesus subverted the status quo and preached a new way of being community. No longer was the unilateral paradigm an acceptable mode of relating; Jesus undermined the master/servant paradigm. This is a major reversal of relationships in a paradigm shift from *power as control and domination to power as love*



and freedom. Peter's efforts to refuse the action of Jesus may well indicate that at a deep interior level he got the point. For the power of God to reign in their lives the disciples would have to be open to transformation. Belonging meant accepting the reversal.

Unilateral and relational power came to their sharpest clash in the death of Jesus. As Suffering Servant he chose not to respond in kind to those who exercised power over him. Rather he grounded his response to violence and hatred in love and freedom, thus, challenging all forms of power that differ from divine power. In the face of incredible violence Jesus exercised genuine relational power on the cross. As the sign that real power is love and freedom, the cross represents the extent to which God will go to draw women and men into a free and loving relationship. Jesus chose the awesome power of compassionate love over the sword. In the living, dying, and rising of Jesus we see the saving power of God.

As we see clearly the essence of relational power in the life of Jesus, questions begin to emerge. Is it possible to live relational power, to live the way Jesus lived? Does unilateral power ever have a place in the relationships and governance of religious? Should leaders ever tell members what they have to do? Should leaders ever say, "no?" These are practical and thought-provoking questions for which there are no easy and straight-forward answers. Nor do I intend to give answers, for these are questions that push boundaries. They demand that we wrestle with them especially in the context of vowed obedience.

#### RELATIONAL POWER - IS IT POSSIBLE TO LIVE IT?

As Christians, we believe that the grace to live as Jesus lived is always available to us. Living into relational power is hard work demanding action that is costly. This approach assumes a profound openness to personal and communal transformation in mature persons. In turn, maturity assumes a strong sense of self-esteem and personal power, a sense of responsibility, and the largeness of heart needed to give and to receive generously. The ability to live authentically and interdependently is a prerequisite for mutuality and reciprocity in relationships. The radicality of relational power invites us to keep struggling as adults to grow into the praxis of relational power and thus be more responsible for the common good. A spirituality that fosters communion through mutuality and dialogue is

As the sign that real power is love and freedom, the cross represents the extent to which God will go to draw people into relationship.

a true praxis of asceticism that invites all to a fuller participation in God's power and a more obedient response to life. By the grace of God we live into relational power, the power of the Gospel.

#### UNILATERAL POWER AND RELIGIOUS LIFE?

Assuming that all avenues for dialogue and mutuality have been exhausted, a "yes" to these questions suggests a situation in which ethical issues, health issues or other serious issues are at stake. The personal good of a member and/or the common good often require the appropriate authority to act when efforts toward mutuality and interdependence fail. For example, leaders may have to insist that persons with addictions get the necessary treatment. Someone requiring nursing care who refuses to acknowledge the need and act on it may have to be told that there is no choice but to move. Under these and similar circumstances relational power does express itself as "tough love." If the leader is coming from the place of love within herself/himself, these actions may be expressions of relational power and a form of control that theologian Evelyn Whitehead describes as legitimate.

#### PERMISSION/APPROVAL---SHOULD LEADERS SAY "NO?"

In the past the practice of asking for permission was an essential aspect of vowed obedience. This practice, which governed the smallest details of everyday living, degenerated to the extent that it manifested the worst of unilateral power. Submission to superiors defined our lives. In some congregations women had to kneel in front of the superior daily for permission to go to school. Although practices of this nature are dated, the same dynamics of power are sometimes operative today when members need approval to do something.

When the process of getting approval takes the form of a "yes" or "no," especially when mutuality and dialogue are absent, the leader has "power over" no

## An alternative to a “yes or no” context is to focus on the situation rather than on the member-leader relationship.

matter how benign its exercise. Situations of this nature can be a catalyst for both sides to “dig in their heels,” thus generating conflict. The possibilities for dialogue are diminished, and it is not possible to work with the conflict in a manner that respects the interests of both parties.

An alternative to a “yes or no” context is to focus on the situation rather than on the member-leader relationship. Both parties must assume responsibility for the common good. Not only does this require openness to listen to the truth of the other who may see the situation differently, but it also requires the capacity and willingness to suffer for a greater good. Both parties must take seriously the claims the community has on her/him and be willing to sacrifice their own interests for the common good—communion within the community. The ideal is to resolve the conflict without resorting to unilateral power. This assumes that at least one person is mature enough to allow the interests of the other to take priority as long as the common good is not compromised. Consider the following situation.

To assist her in deciding if she wants to ask for admission into the novitiate, a candidate receives approval to enter into a formal process of discernment with someone other than her director. After checking with the person of her choice the candidate communicates to the director the availability of the person to companion her. Without any dialogue the director tells the candidate that she may not discern with the person of her choice. The response, when the candidate questions the decision, is “because I said so.” Further questioning results in the candidate being told to find a director outside the community.

Even though the director’s rationale is an unknown, we can make some observations without assigning motives. There was no dialogue with the candidate about her choice, nor did the director share any reasons for her decision. By creating a yes/no context, the director exercised power “over.” The particular candidate, rightly or wrongly, interpreted the director’s

message to be this: Do not take initiative or assume responsibility without permission; the purpose of initial formation is to learn to obey; and she was not trusted to make good decisions for herself.

Had the director been intentional about the use of relational power, what might have been different in this experience? As a starting point, the director would have listened to the reasons for the choice. In place of the yes/no context, the director could have shared her reservations and given the candidate a chance to respond. Were the candidate asked to reconsider her choice, it is possible that she would choose freely to make a different decision. If she were to stand firm in her decision, then the director might simply respect her judgment and bless her decision. Dialogue of this nature reflects a relationship in which all try to be obedient to the common good and to reach a common mind rather than engaging in a power struggle to determine whose will prevails. The task of leadership is to create conditions of freedom that enable members to be who God calls them to be. Leadership is not about control, says Timothy Radcliffe. It is at the service of God’s unpredictable grace.

### AVOIDING THE TRAPS OF UNILATERAL POWER

In *Leadership Without Easy Answers* Ronald Heifetz asserts that naming values is a relatively easy task. The more difficult task is clarifying what the values mean, for this exercise involves relationships with each other. It strikes me that it often appears easier for religious to clarify what values mean when that task involves the church or society. Sorting out their own values and behaviors demands an honesty not easy to come by. This is a challenging task that demands the energies of leaders both for themselves and to encourage members to do the same. Leaders can take concrete steps to monitor their use of power and to respond to their members in ways that nurture their vocations. A recent reflection by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious states that leaders who develop the relational dimension of leadership have the capacity:

- to know and be at home with themselves,
- to project a non-anxious presence,
- to develop and maintain healthy relationships,
- to communicate that people matter and to express and demonstrate affection,
- to form a “we” that includes and vivifies the members,



- and to draw members into dialogue around issues that matter, conflictual topics and decisions to be made.
- The following suggestions may assist leaders to monitor their use of power:
- *A conscious awareness* that a power differential exists between members and leaders may help leaders to maintain perspective and keep them mindful of their responsibility to eliminate abuses of power. Leaders can minimize the effects of the power differential. By sharing power they can broaden the base of power, thus minimizing the concentration of power in themselves.
  - *On-going reflection on their use of power* helps leaders to be honest with themselves and self-critical in the exercise of power. Particular attention needs to be given to *power over* others.
  - *Exercising power-in-connection* as different from power that separates increases the potential for a shared power that embodies interactions with mutuality and dialogue. No matter what the content, leaders should be intentional about maintaining connection. Encouraging members to speak what they perceive to be the truth, especially when their position differs from that of the leaders, helps to build bridges with those who hold conflicting beliefs and values.
  - *Open conversations that create win/win situations* are effective ways of minimizing tension in situations of conflict. They challenge leaders to suspend judgment while trying to listen to and understand a perspective different from their own.
  - *Listening to minority voices* and incorporating their views enriches the outcome. Members know they are heard when leaders make efforts to create win/win situations.

## CONCLUSION

The relationship between members and leaders as they press forward toward a more life-giving exercise of power is an on-going challenge as the new paradigm of power continues to unfold. Relational power, *power as love and freedom*, is the more compelling expression of power for religious since it is the way that Jesus embodied power. Leaders who value mutuality, dialogue, and interdependence embody the loving, freeing, and life-giving power of God. Their members

experience themselves as a significant part of the leadership dynamic.

Living into relational power widens our horizons and serves us in facing the challenges of the 21st century, challenges that require a new level of consciousness. Leaders must call the community to the transformation needed for a new consciousness to evolve. In addition, they are to create the conditions of freedom where every member can be the person God calls her/him to be. They truly enter into the resurrection experience of *power as love and freedom* by exploding a burst of crazy freedom into the world's culture of control and by sharing the intimate energy of love.

"How marvelous it is to live threatened with Resurrection."

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

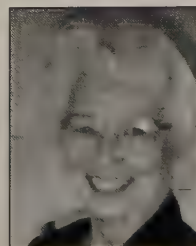
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# Leadership as Administration: A Defense and Suggestions



Patricia Wittberg, S.C.

In much of the writing on the leadership of religious congregations published since the end of the Second Vatican Council three models of religious leadership have been outlined. Leaders have been encouraged to be *prophetic*, challenging their congregations to a deeper realization of a new or refounded common vision. Alternatively, leaders have been urged to become more *pastoral*, aware of their sisters/brothers in the congregation as individuals, listening to them, caring for their brokenness, and calling them to spiritual and psychological growth. To these putatively positive and valued models of religious leadership is counterpoised the model of mere *administration*, which is often dismissed as merely “keeping the trains running on time” without asking where the trains should be going in the first place, or worse, as “rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic” as the ship sinks.

Since no human endeavor is perfect, however, all three of these models of leadership have both strengths and weaknesses. There are times when it is appropriate for the leaders of religious congregations to be prophetic and pastoral, and times when these kinds of leadership would be downright harmful. But previous prescriptive writing has often stressed the positive aspects of prophetic and pas-



toral leadership and ignored their “shadow sides.” Prophetic leaders, even if their interpretation of the congregational vision is a true one, may split their communities—as scores of prophets from Jeremiah to John of the Cross have discovered. And, although prophets are often dynamic and charismatic individuals, many have personal deficiencies that would harm the congregation if they were elected to leadership: they may proclaim false visions out of their own need for power; they may misread the signs of the time and/or the promptings of the Spirit; or they may simply be poor at dealing with the day-to-day realities of the cataclysmic changes they have set in motion. Prophets often have notoriously poor people-skills.

Similarly, the pastoral leadership model has a shadow side that has often been neglected by those prescribing it for religious congregations. While it may be comforting to feel that one’s needs and hopes are heard and attended to by one’s pastoral leaders, “tough love” is also needed at times. Leaders chosen for their empathetic qualities may find it difficult to exercise this challenging love—which is usually needed precisely by those members who most strongly resist it. Even more dangerously, the tendency of pastoral-model leaders to focus on the needs/brokenness/hopes/dreams of *individual* members may cause them to shortchange the larger needs/brokenness/opportunities of the congregation *as a group*.

Whole articles can (and, I hope, will) be written to explore the weaknesses of the prophetic and pastoral models of religious leadership, thus helping congregations to balance each model’s weaknesses with its corresponding strengths. This article, however, has a different purpose: to outline the positive aspects of leadership-as-administration (which have all too often been neglected in previous discussions of religious life), and to put forth some concrete examples of how good administrative leadership might operate. My reason for doing so is because I believe that the prophetic and pastoral models are not always the best roles for leaders of religious congregations. Other individuals or groups within a congregation may be better equipped and positioned to fill the prophetic or pastoral role. *Congregational leaders, I will argue, can often serve their communities much better as good administrators.* If my argument is correct, then we need first to understand and affirm what positive and creative leadership-as-administration would entail, in order to avoid the deficient type of administrative maintenance leadership that has been so rightly criticized by previous

Good administrative leaders need to fulfill three key functions for their congregations: delegation, facilitation, and orchestration.

authors. I will argue here that good administrative leaders need to fulfill three key functions for their congregations: delegation, facilitation, and orchestration.

## DELEGATION

While it may be axiomatic in business and government literature that good administrators are those who know how to delegate, much of the literature on religious leadership does not seem to be aware of this fact. All too often, writers have tended to dichotomize the organizational structure of religious congregations into two undifferentiated levels: top leaders and the grassroots members. This dichotomization, however, neglects an entire range of intermediate structures and groups. In addition to the primary elected leadership (the superior general, council, provincial, etc.) there are many mid-level offices: for example, publicity/communications, the archives, and offices concerned with development, physical plant, or finances. A congregation may also own and operate several ministries on its property: a retreat center, a retirement facility for its own members or for others, an ecological center, etc. All of these have staff who are professionally trained for their ministries and have funding provided for their activities. Many congregations also have established committees, task forces, and small locality-based discussion groups whose members gather on a more or less regular basis. In addition to these formally intermediate structures between the leadership and the grassroots members, the individuals at the grassroots also connect with each other in various informal ways. Where members once may have lived in the same city or local house, they now may be spatially separated but connect electronically through internet lists or chat rooms. The opportunities and pitfalls opened by this new form of connectivity have yet to be fully explored.

If, therefore, a new initiative arises—whether in

chapter, from leadership, or from the grassroots—good administrative leaders need to know how to delegate it to the appropriate intermediate level(s) of the congregation. Such delegation is, I will argue, vastly preferable to the leaders taking the implementation responsibility themselves, or to assuming that grassroots individuals can be left to carry out the initiative on their own. Top-down initiatives frequently fail to generate membership commitment. Grassroots individual efforts are rarely sustainable in the long run, and they frequently engage only some members while leaving the rest either apathetic or actively opposed. Good administrative leaders would, therefore, consider where and how broadly to delegate different aspects of the initiative. Could congregational offices or ministries play a role? Could a group of the members—whether an already-existing small local group or one especially convened from those interested in the issue—be encouraged to help implement it?

An essential, and often omitted, step in the creation of congregational mission statements, action steps, future planning documents, etc., is precisely this delegation process. Congregations cannot naively assume that their individual members will spontaneously take the responsibility for carrying out what they have resolved together. Everyone is simply too busy. Any congregational initiative is much more likely to succeed if a group of the members—preferably those most excited about it or those occupying an office or ministry already related to it—is specifically charged with this task. Groups of individuals support each other, which is why every successful endeavor for personal change from Alcoholics Anonymous to Weight Watchers, and every endeavor for community change from MADD to MoveOn.org, is based on *deliberately-organized group interaction*. By delegating an initiative to one or more middle levels for implementation, good administrative leaders may be able to catalyze this kind of group interaction around it.

## FACILITATION

Mid-level groups or offices, once charged with a delegated task, cannot be left to implement it by themselves. For this reason, good administrative leaders not only *delegate* initiatives to one or several intermediate levels, they also *facilitate* the work of these levels in whatever way possible. This function is, or should be, what is meant by the servant role of leadership: actively helping the intermediate and grassroots levels effect the congregation's

charism. Such a servant role includes inquiring about, or even anticipating, the other levels' needs for secretarial assistance, equipment, informational resources, and/or released time from ministry and travel money for group meetings. It also includes allotting time on congregational meeting agendas or space in community newsletters, to update the rest of the membership on the group's activities and to enlist additional volunteers. As part of their facilitating efforts, good administrative-model leaders may touch base with the leadership of other congregations to garner ideas of what has (or has not) worked elsewhere, and then funnel these ideas to the responsible intermediate level group(s) in their own congregation.

Another necessary component of facilitation is helping these intermediate groups sustain their level of enthusiasm: by encouraging them to make retreats together, by funding their attendance at some conference of like-minded issue groups outside the congregation, or simply by affirming, funding, praising, and publicizing their efforts. Good administrative facilitation must be proactive; it is not enough to sit back and wait until an implementation group or office requests assistance. Sometimes it requires anticipating and providing assistance that the implementing group does not even imagine it needs, and then inspiring the group to greater and more creative efforts in using it. Finally, facilitation may include delegating aspects of the facilitative role itself to intermediate level offices or groups, so that they, too, become involved in smoothing the way for each other.

## ORCHESTRATION

It is probable that various aspects of any truly major congregational initiative will need to be delegated by administrative leaders to several different offices, ministries, small locality groups, or task forces within the congregation. The individual participation of grassroots-level members will need to be enlisted as well. Much like the conductor of an orchestra, therefore, good administrative leadership will be primarily involved in weaving all of these efforts into a coherent whole. This means, first of all, taking whatever steps are necessary to insure that the activities, insights, and enthusiasms of each component group are adequately communicated to the other, as well as to the rest of the congregation. It also involves insuring that component groups are not working at cross-purposes, and that sharing and cross-fertilization of ideas can take place. Finally, orchestration involves calling each group to



accountability for the timely performance of the charge it chose or was given, and trouble-shooting when a group experiences difficulties.

All of this has been rather abstract so far. In the following section, I will provide a few illustrations or examples of how good administrative leadership might fulfill its roles of delegation, facilitation, and orchestration.

#### EXAMPLE #1: IMPLEMENTING AN AGREED-UPON GRASSROOTS INITIATIVE

Now that they no longer all live and work in the same ministries, the Sisters of X have gradually come to realize that they are growing apart from each other; they are less and less aware of the ministerial trials and triumphs, family crises, or personal spiritual journeys of other sisters in the congregation. A pre-chapter gathering surfaced the following proposal: "We will encourage the use of a variety of ways to foster dialog and to share our stories with each other." All of the sisters at the gathering agreed that this was a worthwhile and needed activity. Since this proposal was not deemed chapter-level material, however, it was forwarded to the administrative leaders of the congregation to delegate, facilitate, and orchestrate.

##### First Delegation: The grassroots level.

Sisters were encouraged to post and respond to "Discussion Starter Questions" on the congregation's email listserv, centered around a specific memory or current topic (e.g., "What are your memories of the day you entered the Sisters of X?" or "What feeds you in your present ministry?")

##### Facilitation: Intermediate levels.

- 1) Various congregational offices and ministries—the archives, the spirituality center, the communication office, the physical plant office—were each assigned to post one discussion starter question a month related to their respective interests. The Communications Office was responsible for coordinating these postings, so that the questions did not all appear at once. Individual sisters, of course, were free to post their own questions at any time.
- 2) The infirmity staff and the formation personnel were asked to co-operate in having the novices interview the oldest sisters (who, by and large, did not use the internet) to gather and post their responses to the questions.

- 3) The Communications Office was asked to come up with creative ways in which the sisters' answers could be featured and celebrated in both internal and external community publications. Suggested formats included commissioning artwork from various sisters, designing a page on the congregation's web site, or using selections from the Discussion Starter Questions to compile a daily calendar. The Archives Office, seeing this as good oral history, volunteered to collect, index, and store the responses, with the consent of the sisters who had posted them.

##### Orchestration:

- 1) The administrative leaders were asked to touch base with the whole effort every six months, consulting with both the intermediate offices and the grassroots on how the effort was going: Was posting the Discussion Starter Questions too much trouble for any of the offices or ministries? Were the sisters still interested in responding to them, or were they simply rolling their eyes—"Another DSQ!" and deleting the postings unread? If necessary, the leadership would encourage the members and/or intermediate-level offices to give suggestions on whether and how to improve the practice, or whether it should be abandoned.
- 2) The administrative leaders would check in with the Communications staff on what creative ways they had devised to feature and publicize the responses, and would arrange for their implementation.
- 3) When/if an insight surfaced on any level of the process for some new initiative, the administrative leaders would be responsible for communicating it to the congregation as a whole, gauging the level of interest in it, and delegating/facilitating /orchestrating its implementation in turn.

##### Second Delegation: The Small Group Level

Existing small discussion groups, or specially-convened "Wisdom Circles," were asked to meet on either a one-time or an ongoing basis, and to share their stories around a particular yearly theme (e.g., "Who God/Jesus/Mary is for me," or "How I find God in my ministry"). With the consent of the participants, these story-telling sessions might be taped and sent to the congregational offices.

### **Facilitation: Intermediate and Leadership Levels**

- 1) The Retreat Center was asked to coordinate the initial meeting of new Wisdom Circles (e.g. by announcing/surfacing times and places, by contacting the sisters who expressed interest, by designing a format or opening prayer service for the initial discussion, etc.). After that, the group would plan its own subsequent meetings.
- 2) The administrative leaders agreed to budget for the transcription of tapes generated by the Wisdom Circles and/or the small discussion groups, and to route these transcripts to the Archives and Communications Offices.
- 3) The administrative leaders also agreed to allot time at the semi-annual congregational meetings for Wisdom Circles to meet, since this was a time when all of the sisters would be together anyway.
- 4) The Communications Office was asked to come up with creative ways in which the Wisdom Circle material could be featured and celebrated in both internal and external community publications. Suggested formats included a tape of newly-composed songs, a page on the congregation's web site, or a daily reflection booklet. Some Wisdom Circles volunteered to prepare a skit, prayer service, or other program at one of the congregation's semi-annual meetings. The Archives Office, again seeing all of this as good oral history, volunteered to collect, index, and store any transcribed tapes. This, of course, would be done only with the consent of the sisters involved.

### **Orchestration:**

- 1) The administrative leaders were asked to touch base with the whole effort each year: How many Wisdom Circles had met? How many sisters were involved? If necessary, the leaders would ask the members and/or intermediate-level offices to give suggestions on whether to improve the practice (and, if so, how) or to eliminate it.
- 2) The administrative leaders would check in with the Communications staff every six months on creative ways they had devised to feature the responses, and would arrange for their implementation.

### **EXAMPLE #2: IMPLEMENTATION OF A INITIATIVE FROM A SUBGROUP**

Many of the younger members of Order Y (and several of the older ones as well) would like to live in intergenerational settings with six or seven other mem-

bers of the order—preferably in the inner city or some other impoverished area. The Formation Director supports this initiative, because it is difficult to find viable communities for the novices and temporary professed. They have submitted the following proposal to the order's leadership: "Order Y will support and encourage those members who wish to live together in groups rather than alone and to pursue a simple lifestyle of radical poverty and solidarity with the poor."

**Delegation:** A specially-convened group of those interested in participating was asked to organize and implement this initiative.

### **Initial Facilitation: Convening the Community Planning Groups.**

- 1) The Administrative Leaders allocated space on the annual assembly's agenda for a brainstorming or open space session on group living options. They also employed a trained facilitator and a scribe from outside the order to lead this discussion and keep track of actions suggested, who was interested, etc. It was emphasized that several subsequent sessions might be needed to explore all the options suggested and to compile a list of the members who were interested. Simultaneously with these discussions, the following step was also implemented:
- 2) The Archives were asked to research whether similar brainstorming sessions or surveys had been undertaken before, what level of interest had been surfaced, and what had been the result.
- 3) The Administrative Leaders were asked to use the written reports from the brainstorming session(s) and the archives to devise a survey of the entire membership. All members would be asked to indicate their level of interest. Administration would then contact the members who expressed interest in each of the types of community living that had been surfaced in the brainstorming/open space process and convene a first planning meeting for each group. These Community Planning Groups (CPGs) would be given the responsibility of planning for and setting up a community house centered on their particular vision.

### **Subsequent Facilitation: Helping the CPGs Establish Viable Living Settings**

- 1) The order's Facilities and Grounds Office and the administrators of the various sponsored



ministries owned by the order were asked to report on any possible living space(s) that might be devoted to this effort and how much it would cost to adapt them.

- 2) The Administrative Leaders contacted the bishops and the other religious congregations in the dioceses where the order was primarily located, asking about the availability of convents, rectories, or other under-used buildings, preferably in inner-city locations. A list of these properties would then be supplied to the CPGs.
- 3) The CPGs were each required to hold monthly meetings with a trained outside facilitator a.) to compose a mission/goal statement expressing the focus of their group living, b.) to draw up a Living Agreement, based on their mission statement, of the expectations and rights of everyone covenanting to be part of the living group, and c.) to inspect the available properties, choose one, and make whatever arrangements necessary to begin living there.
- 4) The congregation's administrative offices would serve as a clearing-house for information about vacancies when they arose in any of the living groups and/or additional members who expressed interest in joining a living group.

#### **Orchestration:**

- 1) The Administrative Leaders would touch base with the CPGs and their facilitators twice yearly throughout the initial and subsequent facilitation phases, in order to help trouble-shoot any problems.
- 2) For the first year or two after the house had been established, the members would be encouraged to meet every few months with a trained facilitator, to explore on an ongoing basis how to enhance what was going well and to improve what was not. The Administrative Leaders agreed to fund this facilitation for the house.
- 3) Time at community meetings and space in the order's internal newsletter would be allotted regularly to report on the progress of the initiative and to recruit/convene possible new CPGs. The administrative leaders would co-ordinate the initial and subsequent facilitation processes for any new living groups that became interested in participating in this initiative.
- 4) Since it was believed that any living group whose membership does not "turn over" with

True administrative delegation, facilitation, and orchestration, therefore, should be acknowledged and valued roles for those we elect to religious leadership.

some regularity would stagnate and become a clique, the Administrative Leaders were asked to encourage such turnover by insuring that a routine "moving on" process was established and facilitated. As more CPGs achieved their goal of setting up intergenerational houses, "moving on" could mean simply transferring from one to another.

#### **CONCLUSION**

As can be seen from these examples, "administration" properly conceived is not merely performing routine tasks to keep a congregation running in the same way that it has always been run. Such a maintenance-model of administration is the last thing a religious congregation needs. But truly prophetic or pastoral models of leadership may be equally unsuited to leadership at the present time. I would argue that both the leaders and the members of congregations understand this on some instinctive and unconscious level, although it may not be politically correct for them to admit it even to themselves. Consequently, we say we want "prophetic leaders," but we rarely elect any-and, when we do, we systematically undermine any of their attempts to mobilize our congregations for truly radical change. We say we want "pastoral leaders," but only if they confine themselves to exercising the affirming side of pastoral leadership. Or we load them with so many board meetings and bureaucratic tasks (which are not the same as true administrative leadership!) that they never have time to be truly pastoral leaders.

In contrast, I am arguing here that, however necessary the prophetic and pastoral roles of leadership may sometimes be, *they will not be enough unless they also are leavened by a delegating, facilitating, and orchestrating administrative component.* In fact, the prophetic role in a congregation often may be more suitably exercised, not at the level of the top leadership, but at

an intermediate or even grassroots level of the congregation. A member who is “on fire” with a particular vision of the order’s charism could be encouraged and challenged by good administrative leaders to enlist other members in a preliminary living out of that vision. By providing a protected space for those with a prophetic vision to experiment with its realization, and by facilitating and orchestrating the experimental process, administrative leaders can help the congregation as a whole to avoid suffering from any mistakes that might be made. Pastoral functions, too, might more effectively be exercised by specially trained members closer to the individual members who need them—a delegated person or persons from the community’s membership in a given city, for example.

True administrative delegation, facilitation, and orchestration, therefore, should be acknowledged and valued roles for those we elect to religious leadership. While the leaders of congregations may indeed need to act prophetically or pastorally in some instances, their primary role at other times may be creatively and enthusiastically to administer prophetic and pastoral initiatives as they occur elsewhere among the membership: to recognize and affirm these initiatives as they arise (both more nurturing terms than “delegate” but meaning the same thing in this context); to water, tend, and fertilize them as they grow (facilitation); and to weed, prune, and cross-pollinate them as they mature (orchestration), all in the hope of reaping a hundred-fold harvest. I believe that this is what truly beneficial administration entails, and why it is so urgently needed in religious congregations today.

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# A Voice from Very Low Tech

James Torrens, S.J.

## ASCENSION DAY

Lift up your heart, says the Mass,  
and your mind, says Plato,  
and your two feet, says my mother  
and your bent shoulders.

Don't let the law of gravity  
get you down.  
Dream that old dream  
of wingless flying.

Fair enough, I say, once I  
can dope out how the earth works,  
what connects to what,  
how to navigate it.

Also the birds are piping up,  
robin against mockingbird,  
the jacaranda's in full blue  
and Jupiter catches my eye.

Ascended Master,  
I am practiced at lift off,  
but you've not really left us  
and you like feet on the ground.

So why bother? Because this mysterious world and universe that God called us into deserves admiration and praise. And for that you need a measure of understanding. One does not have to read a biology textbook or peer into a microscope to find matter for admiration, but they greatly help, as do observatories, aquariums and science museums. I remember being struck, years ago, by Paulo Freire, that innovator of adult literacy and critical thinking in Latin America, to hear him express his interest in contemporary physics. In a more meat-and-potatoes sense, respect for the world God keeps on creating, or co-creating, means to learn how it works—ipods, wireless internet, stem-cell research, laser surgery.

Religion, with its concern for the Otherworld and the coming life, does not justify our diminishing interest in this current existence. Vale of tears it may often be, which one can yearn to transcend. Time of trial it always is, which we can want to be done with, but that does not make it less precious. Certain absorbing styles of prayer can have the effect of leaving out the actual world—the messy decisions, the ailing friends, the intractable enmities. When these concerns come up in our prayer, we are prone to feel guilty about them as distractions. They may be there to be turned into prayer.

As we think back to the gospel scene juxtaposing Mary and Martha, we certainly have to admit that the contemplative Mary hit on the essential and did have the better part. But Jesus criticized Martha's anxiety and irritation, not her alertness to the needs of guests and her serviceable spirit. She had the recipes on which the household depended, she knew the tradesmen. The Marys of this world, with the gift of being lost in God, should not get so lost as to lose anchor. A theology professor of my acquaintance once put this a little irreverently: "Too much church is bad for you." And Eucharistic theology was his specialty.

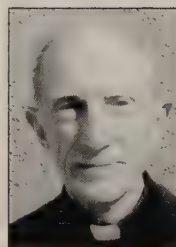
The Ascension of Jesus gives us a tremendous image of his absorption into the realm of his Father. This mystery in Our Lord's life is meant as a preview of the same elevation of spirit promised to us all. It is

Decades ago, when I was in graduate school with the present editor of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, he caught me with a couple of issues of *Scientific American* and, on another occasion, with a book entitled *Basic Car Care*. This evoked from him some innocent merriment. Amidst my literary studies, what did I expect to get out of these sources so foreign to me? The skepticism was well-founded. I have certainly never mastered car care and am still a very unscientific American. The magazine by that name has always been pretty hard sledding.

meant to stoke our longing and anchor our hope. We do indeed need to lift up our hearts, continually, habitually. But the angels, after the Lord's ascension, had to tell the apostles, Don't stand there gaping. The presence of heaven on earth was already begun, but just barely. God's world was awaiting its transformation, with their help. Today this same world still needs rescuing from chaotic use and abuse. Total control can obviously not be left to the children of this world.

In some ways, what I have just said stems from my lifetime battle between Plato and Aristotle. The battle is between strong aspirations toward the ideal and toward unification of thought (which is my temperament), and, on the other hand, the analytic habit, which likes to take things, or systems, apart and build them back up again (which is my philosophic training). Pursuit of a perfect and immaterial world—the Platonic urge—can take one to giddy elevations, far from one's

roots and limits. It is not the world that Christ entered. The divine Word, completely at home in the purity and blessedness of God, became flesh. Saint John, who put it that way famously, had to fight his own Platonic tendencies. It was in material conditions—an impoverished town, a manual trade, the hunger and fatigue of life on the road, the Jewishness of the Holy Land—that salvation was acted out, and keeps being acted out.



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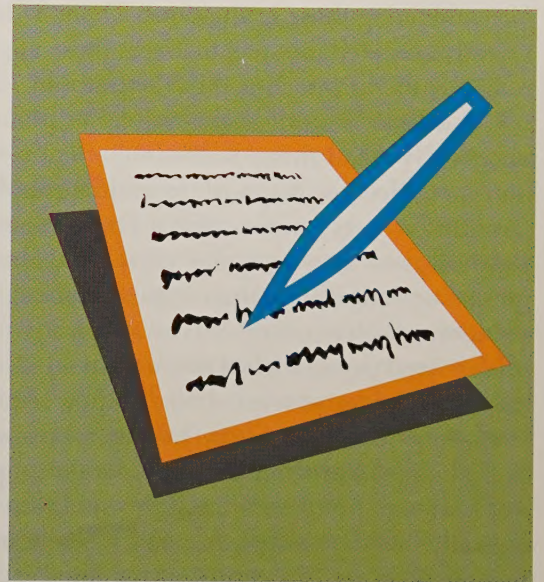
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# A PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF APPLICANTS FOR PRIESTHOOD AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

Thomas G. Plante, Ph.D.



The recent clergy sexual abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church have focused a great deal of attention on how we evaluate applicants to the priesthood and religious life. The crisis has underscored the critical need to ensure that men who have a sexual predilection towards children be barred from entering religious life and priesthood. Additionally, men who have other significant psychiatric conditions that put them at risk of harming children or others have no place as Church leaders or clergy in positions where they have access to and power over vulnerable others.

So how does the Catholic Church currently ensure that applicants to religious life and priesthood are psychologically "fit for duty?" The formation and vocation directors of all religious congregations and dioceses use a variety of ways to evaluate those who seek to serve the Church as priests, brothers, deacons, sisters, and so forth. Even within each religious congregation or between adjacent dioceses there can be wide variations in terms of the policies and procedures developed to evaluate these applicants. Furthermore, new vocation directors, new bishops, and other changes in personnel often mean shifting policies and procedures



If someone has a history of behavioral, psychiatric, or emotional problems, then the odds are reasonably high that these behaviors and problems will reappear in the future.

for conducting these evaluations. There is no one universally accepted protocol to assess these applicants for religious life or priesthood in the Catholic Church.

The lack of a universal evaluation protocol is not necessarily a bad thing. Individual religious congregations and dioceses may wish to evaluate applicants differently for very good reasons. Furthermore, specific psychological tests may be more suitable for some groups or individuals than others. Nonetheless, most vocation and formation directors typically turn to the professional psychological community to assist them in their evaluation process. Usually they request that a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist, who is well versed in Catholic culture and tradition, conduct a psychological evaluation to determine if the applicant is psychologically healthy enough to enter the seminary or formation program. No consistent national policies exist to determine exactly how these evaluations are conducted or what, if any, psychological assessment procedures or tests are used. These decisions are most often left to the discretion of the mental health professional conducting the evaluation in consultation with the vocation or formation director for the local religious community or diocese.

The recent clergy sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church offers a timely and much needed opportunity to reflect on the evaluation processes used to screen applicants for religious life and priesthood. There are three goals that must be kept in mind as we reflect on these procedures.

#### GOAL 1: DOES THE APPLICANT HAVE A PSYCHOLOGICAL OR PSYCHIATRIC DISORDER?

Perhaps the most important goal of the evaluation process is to determine if applicants have a psychiatric or psychological condition that would prevent them

from being productive and successful members of the clergy or religious congregation. For example, all reasonable persons would clearly agree that sex offenders should be kept out of ministry—most especially when the ministry involves any contact with children or vulnerable others. There are many other psychiatric or psychological conditions that may also preclude someone from being selected for ministry. These include psychotic illnesses such as schizophrenia, severe substance abuse and dependence such as on alcohol, significant personality disorders (e.g., antisocial, borderline, or paranoid personalities), active, severe, and untreated affective or mood disorders (e.g., major depression, bipolar illness), homicidal or suicidal tendencies and behaviors, sexual disorders (e.g., pedophilia), impulse control disorders that involve gambling, anger management, sexual fetishes, and so forth. Therefore, the first goal of the psychological evaluation is to determine if the applicant is free of major psychopathology or psychiatric disturbance.

So, how does one determine if someone is free from psychopathology or psychiatric disturbance? First, in the behavioral sciences we often refer to the notion that “the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.” Thus, if someone has a history of behavioral, psychiatric, or emotional problems, then the odds are reasonably high that these behaviors and problems will reappear in the future. For example, if someone has had a pattern of inappropriate sexual expression with minors, the odds are high that these struggles will continue in the future. Therefore, closely examining an applicant’s psychological and psychiatric history through clinical interview or some appropriate kinds of documentation (e.g., medical or psychiatric records) can help to determine a history or pattern of problematic behaviors or conditions. This is easier to accomplish now than in the past since the average age of applicants to religious life is much older than in years gone by. Therefore, there are more years of living to evaluate and examine. Most of the problems listed above will appear by adulthood, and thus there should be some record of these troubles prior to applying for religious life. This was not the case in earlier eras when minor seminaries admitted teens who had not yet fully matured and developed.

Second, psychological testing that specifically examines psychological and psychiatric dysfunction is important to include in any evaluation process. A test such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality



Inventory-2nd Edition (MMPI-2) is likely to be the best option to achieve this goal. It is a very well-established and frequently used test that measures a wide variety of psychological and personality issues. In addition to validity measures that determine a respondent's manner or approach to the test (e.g., defensive), the MMPI-2 provides a long list of measures such as anxiety, depression, oppositionality, psychotic thinking, paranoia, manic behavior, and much more and compares the individual's responses to both general national norms and to seminary applicant norms. I would suggest that all serious applicants to seminary or religious life be required to complete this test in order to examine their psychological and personality functioning. The MMPI-2 is, in my opinion, the best measure of psychopathology available today.

If personality disorders are of primary interest to those with the responsibility for evaluating applicants, then the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-3rd Edition (MCMI-III) is a useful addition to the MMPI-2. The MCMI-III is a well-researched and frequently used test that specifically focuses on personality disorders. It can indicate the chances that an applicant experiences personality disorders such as paranoia, antisocial personality, borderline personality, histrionic personality, obsessive-compulsive personality, and so forth. Both of these tests need to be administered by a trained licensed psychologist, but since the tests are self-report (i.e., fill-in true-false questions) and are usually computer scored, they take minimal professional time to administer, score, and interpret. Wholesale costs are about \$40 per test per administration.

Two problems can often emerge when using these testing devices. First, since applicants are usually trying to present themselves in a favorable and often virtuous light, applicants can often appear highly defensive and not admit to typical problems, concerns, and conflicts to which the average person would admit. This defensive, and sometimes pious, posture often can invalidate the testing results thereby making the use of the tests worthless. Secondly, these tests assume a solid basic understanding of the English language. Both language and cultural differences can make it inappropriate to use these tests. Because many of the applicants for religious life and priesthood in U.S. seminaries and formation programs today were born in Vietnam, the Philippines, Mexico or Latin America, language and cultural assimilation issues must be very carefully considered prior to administering these tests.

Psychological testing that specifically examines psychological and psychiatric dysfunction is important to include in any evaluation process.

GOAL 2: DOES THE APPLICANT HAVE A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE AND DISPOSITION THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH PRIESTHOOD OR RELIGIOUS LIFE?

Once it has been determined that the applicant is free of major psychopathology, the next goal of the evaluation is to determine if the person's psychological and personality disposition is consistent with religious life and/or priesthood. The particular details of the type of life for which they are applying must be taken into account when trying to answer the question of psychological "goodness of fit." For example, someone interested in the more contemplative and cloistered life of a Carmelite sister or Benedictine monk would most likely have a personality profile very different from someone more interested in the often highly engaged lifestyle of a Jesuit priest or Mercy sister. Someone primarily interested in being a parish priest would most likely be very different in terms of personality style from someone drawn to be a university theologian. A clinical interview as well as additional testing may help to answer these kinds of psychological and personality "goodness of fit" questions.

The Sixteen Personality Factors Questionnaire (16PF, 5th edition) has often been used to achieve this goal. It assumes that the respondent does not suffer from significant psychiatric disturbance and measures 16 different personality dimensions (e.g., forthright, sensitive, warm, open to change). Furthermore, a good deal of research has been conducted on the 16PF with seminary applicants. A template seminary profile is available which enables an applicant's results to be compared with seminary applicant norms. Additionally, the 16PF offers profiles that are typical of various career categories. Thus, one can determine if the applicant's profile tends to fit the types of careers in which seminarians and religious might participate (e.g., teaching, counseling, administration). Wholesale costs are only about \$20 per test per administration. As with



the MMPI-2 and MCMI-III, language, cultural background, and a highly defensive or virtuous manner can invalidate the 16PF results with particular applicants.

Projective instruments such as the Forer Structured Sentence Completion Test (FSSCT) can also add useful information to the evaluation process in an affordable manner. It includes 100 sentences that respondents are asked to complete (e.g., My mother..., I was most depressed when...). The FSSCT is less labor intensive (and thus less expensive) than other projective tests such as the Rorschach and Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). Clinical interviews can also help determine the personality style of the applicant (e.g., good or poor social skills, ability to reflect, ability to display empathy).

### GOAL 3: DOES THE APPLICANT WANT TO ENTER THE SEMINARY OR RELIGIOUS LIFE FOR GOOD ENOUGH REASONS?

Once it is determined that applicants are (i) both free of psychopathology or psychiatric disturbance and other risk factors, and (ii) have a personality style or psychological profile reasonably consistent with the religious congregation or diocese, then the seminary or formation program may wish to evaluate the reasons they want to enter. A clinical interview can help understand applicants' reflection and discernment process and examine the factors that led them to the decision to seek entry into the seminary or religious life. Applicants may have a sense of God's call and have received appropriate spiritual direction along the way. They may wish to serve God and the community in active ministry or perhaps want to focus on a life of contemplative prayer.

On the other hand some applicants inappropriately may seek entry into religious life or priesthood after a traumatic relationship termination or rejection. Some older applicants may want to be taken care of and decide to join hoping that the religious congregation or diocese will do that for them. These are, of course, not very good reasons to enter. Some of the more subtle yet problematic reasons for seeking entry into seminary or religious life can be best evaluated by a psychologist or other mental professional who may ask questions in a probing way that others find difficult or impossible to do.

Ultimately vocation and formation directors and their committees determine who is and who is not fit to enter religious life or seminary. The mental health professionals who conduct psychological evaluations cannot make these decisions. Rather they can provide useful information about psychological and psychiatric functioning, identify potential risk factors, and help the religious community or seminary have a fuller sense of the person being evaluated. This can be completed in an efficient and cost-effective manner. Doing these evaluations well with state-of-the-art assessment instruments by those who are familiar with Catholic traditions can result in excellent applicants moving on to seminary and religious life while keeping out applicants who are not suited for these vocations. The recent clergy sexual abuse crisis in the Church highlights the need to do all that we can do to evaluate those who seek to enter religious life and priesthood.

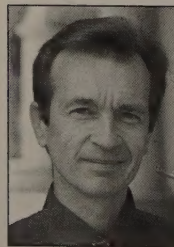
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